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CRITICAL AND CREATIVE TOWARDS THE MEDIA

Edited by

Thomas Srampickal

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Critical and Creative Towards the Media

Edited by

Thomas Srampickal

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Editorial

There is no doubt about the prevalence and popularity of the mass media today. Since the human is basically a communicating being, the revolutionary changes in the field of communication have great significance for and impact on every level of human life and activity. As the recent Vatican document *Ethics in Advertising* reminds us the media should be counted among the 'gifts of God'. The whole media is in fact a tool in the hands of humans, which can be used well or ill, for good or evil. Fast information-diffusion, mass education, unification of the whole world into a 'global village', etc., are some of its great advantages, especially of the television. Cultural homogenization, elitism, projection (and glorification) of sexual exploitation, violence, etc., are some of its major disadvantages. The most pervasive and unhealthy aspect of the TV media today is probably the explicit and implicit promotion of consumerism. Satisfy all needs, consume as much as possible, enjoy life, have the latest and the best, pleasure is the ultimate in life, be the smartest, trendiest and most glamorous, there is no place for the weak, the less fit, and the suffering on this earth ... are the messages overtly or covertly but always enticingly transmitted very often. It turns, as William Fore observes, sexuality into sentimentality, play into fight, self-esteem into pride, fantasy into reality, and so exploits people to its own advantage.

According to a report, the annual government allotment to Doordarsan, the national TV network, was 200 crore rupees in the late 80s; but in 1994-95 it was reduced to 33 crore rupees, hardly 10% of its total annual expenditure. The rest it collected from the sponsors. This is a good example for the heavy financial dependence of the TV on sponsors, It is therefore true to say that 'the media deliver the audiences to advertisers' who are there to do business and make money rather than to promote any sound human values. On account of this however it is not wise to ignore or not to be involved in the media which will continue to exert its influence ever more, bringing about a mixture of good

and bad effects. What is needed is critical viewing and creative use of the media. Entrusted with a basically communicative mission — the proclamation of the good news — the church should be in the fore-front of a critical and creative use of the media. The church is already aware of that, but there is still a long way to go.

Application of the fundamental ethical principles of communication is a key factor in a critical appreciation of the media. Undoubtedly, the media are doing a great service to the common good by providing various sorts of necessary and useful information to the public. In order to be able to fulfill this task the media should enjoy sufficient freedom of expression. But their work serves the genuine common good only if they respect the norms of truth and justice in such a way that it promotes human solidarity. Therefore, the freedom of investigation and expression as well as the demands of truth, justice and human solidarity are to be finely balanced. The ethical calibre of the media depends very much on this fine balancing.

First of all, the information that is disseminated should be true. The media have no right to twist facts or parade fiction as facts and mislead the people. The shrewd mixture of fact and fiction is particularly to beware of. This however does not permit the media to publish any truth about anybody because such blunt revelation of truth might be detrimental to the good name and reputation of the people concerned, besides often serving no useful purpose. In fact, the media have the obligation to respect, in the process of investigation and expression, the privacy of individuals. The UN's universal declaration on human rights which upholds the right to freedom of expression protects also the right to one's privacy and reputation. "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation" (art. 12).

'Critical and creative use of the media' is the theme of this issue. We are very grateful to the contributors — all experts in their fields — for their articles dealing with the various aspects of the theme. We hope this provides some help for a discerning and constructive approach towards the complex world of the media.

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Thomas Srampickal

Youth and the Media

Peter Gonsalves

The youth constitute a group that is most vulnerable to the influence of the media. Three characteristics of the youth — search for identity, crave for freedom and the push and pull of sexuality — make them very exploitable. It is the challenge of the youth to be critical of media messages and go through the turmoil of their age responsibly and without being swept off.

Nowhere is the impact of the mass media felt so strongly as in the lives of young people. "Kids are big business, and big business needs youngsters compliant, vulnerable and hooked on their fads, fashions and addictions", says fore-front media critic, Ralph Nader.

Fortune magazine, May, 1994 called teenagers "the most global market of all". It revealed the startling fact that teenagers and young people between 20 to 25 have the same tastes in all the major cities of the world. "In an ingenious experiment, the New York City ad agency BSB Worldwide videotaped teenagers' rooms in 25 countries. From the gear and posters on display, it's hard to tell whether the rooms are in Los Angeles, Mexico City, or Tokyo. Basket balls sit alongside soccer balls. Closets overflow with staples from an international, unisex uniform: baggy Levi's or Diesel jeans, NBA jackets, and rugged shoes from Timberland or Doc Martens."

According to a study on the urban child in India, total youth viewership (that includes the rural areas) is approximately 31%. It is enough to study youth culture prevalent in colleges of towns and cities to realise where young people get the inspiration for their life-style, patterns of behaviour, dress codes and jargon. Rural India too, is not far behind. Multinational lifestyles are

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presented as part of TV and film culture which is gradually invading the once sacrosanct regions of village social life.

But, the fact that youth are most influenced by mass media is no chance side-effect phenomenon. They are, in truth, the *target* of most mass media campaigns. Films, advertisements, songs and many TV and radio programmes are produced with youth in focus.

Given this situation, we need to ask ourselves a fundamental question: Why are youth so highly susceptible to media influence?

There are three problems common to the experience of all young people:

1. The problem of identity

Between the ages 13 to 23, the young person is undergoing very upsetting changes at various depths of his / her personality. Physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually the transition from childhood to adulthood can throw a young person off balance.

This transition means surrendering the ownership by parents and entering into one's self-possession — a period of searching, questioning, doubting fraught with its successes as well as failures. Exploration, curiosity and adventure can sometimes cross socially acceptable limits. In Jesus' classic parable, the prodigal son wanted to become somebody other than (merely) the "son of his father". The choice to venture to a foreign land and to live life in gay abandon cost him dearly.

Often the problem of identity is never isolated. It is coupled with another craving: the need for recognition — "What do my friends think of me?" The young person fully accepts the peer group in exchange for total acceptance by them. At this stage parental recognition is not welcome and, at times, is outrightly rejected.

This craving for identity and recognition makes the young people want to imitate models, ape life-styles and chase dreams. Here is where the media come in as their best friends.

The media offer youth instant substitute-identities through tinsel heroes, teeth whiteners, crazy dress codes, romantic filmy sequences, male and female stereotypes and the like. These moments of recognition, of being 'in', provide the satisfaction, the refreshing break from the stifling boredom of parental concern

and tradition. It takes a perceptive eye to see the falsity in these soap-bubble solutions.

2. The Problem of Freedom

As youth encounter the real world of misery and desperation, many yield to frustration and despair. They begin to disown their allegiance to a world "created by adults" and desire a world of their own making. This drive for independence for setting their own agendas and fulfilling their own objectives can become an obsession with the more rebellious. They crave for an environment of freedom where ample scope for experimentation without accountability is provided.

Naturally, then, on the external front, and against the backdrop of normally accepted adult behaviour, youth are seen as inconsistent. Choices made yesterday are forgotten. Resolutions are meant to be broken. Books are thrown callously, clothes are not washed for days, time-tables are not adhered to ...

The youthful mind is fertile ground for ideologies and experimentation. Given a cause youth will be ready to die for it. The Mandal immolations and the Ayodhya demolition are vivid examples that testify to the fanatical potential of misdirected youthful idealism.

The media is party to the inconsistency of young people. Crazy fashions promoted by the world of business keep challenging youth to be outrageously daring and different. Breaking free goes all the way — denim jeans tattered with bullet-riven holes. a hair-do in streaks of yellow, purple and green; pony-tails on boys ... The message is clear: Be sensational and you are bound to be recognized.

3. The Problem of Sex

The natural biological changes that young people experience in their bodies, mind and spirits are often accepted with a sense of awe, curiosity and excitement. But it is not without its moments of confusion, frustration and deep-seated guilt.

Already insecure with their identity, young people experience greater confusion in the area of sex. Parents and elders are reticent about it. Peers, on the other hand, seem to talk only about it, and that too, at a very superficial level. Unfortunately, this is often the first education youth receive in sexual matters.

Once again, the media have a field day. The experiences of romantic affection and attraction are capitalised upon. Infatuation is called love. Sex and love are projected as interchangeable. Love and sex are commodities that one can put on and put off like the clothes we wear. Love is reduced to a workable relationship that lasts as long as the feeling lasts. Words like trust, self-control and fidelity are foreign to the media vocabulary. *Santa Barbara* and *Tara* are two examples of how non-committed love is portrayed as 'a normal way of life'.

So how do youth swim against the media current that engulfs them without, at the same time, losing their sense of direction, purpose and enthusiasm?

As I see it, the four great challenges facing young people who live in a media-saturated world today are:

1. The Challenge to be original without surrendering one's identity

Young people must learn to get in touch with the changes that are taking place within them. This means a constant self-awareness, watching one's self as one grows, getting in touch with one's sunshine-side and shadow-side. This leads to an honest self acceptance that will, in turn, lead to a healthy self-esteem — a life-long journey which may not always be comforting, yet, the option must be made when one is young.

This on-going discovery, acceptance and option for one's original vocation must stand up to the pressure of peer conformism without isolating oneself from the group — something that requires great tact and courage.

That is why the decision to be original can only come if strengthened by a direct and loving relationship with one's Creator — the Fountain and Source of originality. "Here I am, Lord, ready to do your will" was Saul's safe-guard amidst the insecurity of his identity-search. It still is a safeguard for many teenagers today.

2. The challenge to be free without surrendering one's responsibility

The freedom that young people would like, an unrestricted, unaccountable freedom — a type one sees in some TV serials and

commercials, does not exist. Instead, we live a contextualized freedom — one with limits according to what is socially, morally and spiritually accepted or not.

Youth must be challenged to internalize the meaning of rules, regulations, tradition and not follow them blindly or merely for the sake of pleasing others. True growth is from within. To run away from these apparent restrictions is to run from reality and one's true self.

We, who share the Christian vision of life have only one life to live, only one life to think and act in. True growth means taking responsibility for that one life and giving it our best shot. Our dreams and our ideals are motivators that keep us enthusiastically inclined towards our goal. But it is only hard work with faith, courage and responsibility that will get us there. If youth want their dreams to become reality, there is only one solution: they must wake up!

3. The challenge to love without surrendering one's ability to sacrifice

Sex has complete meaning only in the context of true love. This is a loaded statement and yet one that has been proved true for centuries. The range of emotions — affection, attraction, infatuation — is not love. They are steps towards sexual attraction. Love involves more: the commitment for life — an eternal embrace. This is a love founded on Eternal Love Himself. Sex is an expression of true love and the sacredness of sex is true love.

4. The challenge to be media-educated

Finally, the challenge to youth in each of the above problems that affect their lives is to be aware of the power of the media to promote good as well as evil. It is incumbent on youth to be critical consumers of the media's many messages. It is in their own interest that they exercise discretion in separating the chaff from the wheat.

The media, they must see, are not concerned friends eager to help and take responsibility for what they propagate. They are rather big businesses that thrive on sensationalism that subtly influence, persuade and shape opinion to their advantage and for the benefit of greater profits.

Surely, it is not easy to be young today! The pressures have increased just as the unrestricted stream of ideas that flood our homes have. Caught in the whirlpool of a fast-paced media revolution, youth are faced with the enormous challenge of staying sane, safe and sure. Only when they develop a discerning attitude within this ambient, when they are ready to stake all for the principles they wish to live by, when they are firmly grounded in the security that comes from believing in God, only then will they have the courage to ensure that *they* use the media rather than allow the *media* to use them.

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Cinema, Alternative Media and the Mission of the Church

Jacob Srampickal

This two–part article offers constructive reflections on the importance of the Alternative Media and the potential of the Cinema for Evangelization. The Indian media world has been revolutionized by the mass–media, especially the television, in the past decade. Without denying their massive influence, the author recounts the major unhealthy characteristics of the mass-media, like one-way communication, cultural camouflage, projection of elitist values-cum-life-style and high cost. Consequently, he emphasizes the need of resorting to and encouraging alternative media, like village drama, puppetry, street-plays, story telling-cum-dancing, etc. The sharing of the author's personal experiences in viewing certain 'elevating films' like Jesus of Nazareth (Zeffirelli), Gandhi (Attenborough); Pather Panchali (Satyajit Ray), Esthappan (Aravindan), etc., is definitely enriching.

It is over a century since the media is on us in a big way. Although print medium has been around for many more years, its impact as a mass medium began to make waves only in the late 19th century. Over the last ten years television has exploded into the lives of the ordinary people in a way as never before. And the other media too have developed much more, proving the maxim, one medium never cancels another, but only builds. The church needs to choose its type of communication carefully. By its very nature it needs a method of communication that is liberative, egalitarian, indigenous, rural and geared to the development of all especially the poor, the marginalized and women. A cursory look

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at the characteristics of the mass media will tell us that the church needs to look for alternative means.

I. The Need of Alternative Media in India

Let us look at the characteristics of the various media as these exist today and observe why alternative media are important.

Characteristics of the Mass Media

A. Mass Media are one way Communication

Mass media offer a top down communication, controlled by the government or the moneyed class, with hardly any feedback possible from the audience. The government imposes its views on the people, on every aspect of development. Even in the daily round up of news, the government in power chooses what the people should know. When it comes to control by the moneyed classes again, they have a certain bias and status quo to maintain. Their values, beliefs and aspirations find precedence over the poorer people who are a majority in the country. The controlling classes continue to hold sway irrespective of the concerns of the people at the receiver's end.

This kind of a communication calls for an alternative. And so we talk of a people's participatory communication or Group media.

Participatory communication presupposes that the people are equal, have access to dialogue, discussion, decision-making and are part of the action. Number of small media, called Group Media, are developed with this aim in mind. Group discussions and productions of media like posters, plays, puppetry, story telling, street plays etc. allow for these participative dynamics.

B, Mass media lack culture specificity

The mass media are not very culture specific. We know that culture is a very important aspect of communication. Any communication is possible only through a specific culture. The mass media cater to a large mass of people and hence the question arises, "whose culture shall it include?" Often it is the culture of the elite, which is alien to the ordinary people. Hence we speak of an alternative. Cultural Communication includes traditional media of expression like story telling, songs, music, dance etc.

Love for, and appreciation and expertise in the traditional media of the place like *tamasha* (Maharashtra), *therukoothu* (Tamil Nadu) and *nautanki* (North India) can be fostered systematically through workshops and seminars on these.

There is another area that needs to be highlighted in this context. Because the Mumbai and the western Indian Christians are being projected over the media at large, Christians are understood in India to be foreigners and anti-Indian. Christianity also has a tradition of being militant and almighty, and indigenous cultures have been brought down to earth in many missionary countries. Because of these reasons it is very essential that Christians take keen interest in the cultural media.

C. Mass media are directed mostly at the urban class

The mass media are often urban based. The media have easy access to all the cities. Hence cities have all the possible development. The media find it easy to talk to the urban audiences. Almost every news item and the other feature items in the media are geared to the city audience.

Hence it is important to talk about rural media, a media to which the rural audiences have easy access. Rural audiences have knowledge of and control over these rural forms.

Rural media like story telling, singing, dancing, village dramas, village panchayats can be developed and taught through the experts in these fields.

D. The mass media are generally very costly

Reach to the media is beyond the ordinary lower middle class group. Owning a media group is absolutely not possible, even buying access to every media daily is almost impossible to the lower income groups. Hence an alternative is to be sought in low cost media.

Training and production in low cost media like making slides without camera, lantern slide projector, puppets, various forms of village dramas, group games etc. could be amply studied and analyzed to develop appreciation for these.

E. The mass media are generally entertainment oriented

The glamour and showmanship displayed in the mass media mesmerize the ordinary people and entertainment becomes the

end-all of the mass media. Hence we need to create a media where education and development are given more importance.

Theories of development, growth and education need to be made popular especially among the poorer classes so that these could be powerfully used as tools of communication and development in the rural areas.

The church so much involved in education in the country needs to realize that purely entertainment oriented media cut into its valuable resources and time. Therefore some sort of restriction to entertainment orientation is a must.

Why should the Church concentrate on the various alternative media for a better service to the people?

From what has been said it is clear that the church needs to adapt an alternative approach to the media. It simply cannot be part of the media that ignore the plight of the marginalised and concentrates on a consumer culture.

It is clear from the gospels that Jesus had a preferential option for the poorest of the poor. It was just enough that Jesus became a man and lived among men, but he chose to be born as a poor person and lived among the poorest. His disciples were mostly from among the lowest strata of society — tax collectors, fishermen, labourers etc. He lived with them, did not own anything, hadn't even a place to lay his head. He died the death of a common criminal, only later to be exonerated by God.

In a country like India where there are a large number of poor, voiceless people, the Church is supposed to get involved in their lives and help them voice their aspirations. Working with them, the church can surely contribute to their all round growth if local cultural forms are used for awareness and education. For Rita Renu Silvano, the experience of group communication is for liberation. It is the experience of becoming more fully human in the sense of recovering that which is essentially human, namely the capacity for creativity, freedom and love. This in turn leads one to become more fully Christian in the sense that "putting on Christ" (Rom. 13: 14) and "living in Christ" (Rom. 6: 4) become experiential and gain real meaning.[1]

Are not Group media/Cultural media/Low Cost media/Rural media/ Educational media the same?

These are not to be understood the same at all. They have similar characteristics but different thrusts. The various elements of all these can be combined together in certain forms like street plays, story telling forms, puppetry etc.

In fact in their document on Christian Principles of Communication, the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC) has stated very clearly the following: 1. Communication is participatory; 2. Communication creates community; 3. Communication liberates; 4. Communication develops and supports cultural identity; 5. Christian communication is prophetic, i. e., it challenges existing structures and leads to action for transformation. This is the ideal role of these various media listed above.[2]

The Puebla document sums up concisely the advantages of group media. Without neglecting the necessary and urgent presence of the mass oriented media, it is urgent we intensify our use of the Media of Group Communication (MGC). Besides, being less costly and easier to handle, they offer the possibility of dialogue and they are more suited to person to person type of evangelization that will evoke truly personal adhesion and commitment.[3]

Street Play as an example of an Effective Alternative Media

Today street has been recognized as powerful and effective alternative media. In fact all the above characteristics of alternative media can easily be identified in a well prepared street play.

Normally a street play is improvised on the spot, in the context of a workshop. It is never learnt from a text or adapted from a previous text. The contribution of the people i. e., the participants of the workshop in preparing and presenting the play is paramount. This is definitely very different from watching a film or a television programme where someone else's production is thrust on the audience. Here the lives and struggles of the people are copied verbatim from their own personal experiences. Hence by all means it is not a one way communication, it is participative, it is group media alive.

Street plays have their origin in the folk theatre forms of India. When the Muslims conquered India in the 12th century, they discouraged and destroyed the well established Sanskrit

Theatre tradition. The practitioners of Sanskrit Theatre had to take refuge with the folk theatre practitioners and the characteristics of both merged to a great extent. Today street plays use several of the characteristics of these ancient forms. So the cultural continuity with Indian theatre traditions is very strong in street theatre. Open air, round theatre format, audience participation, songs and dances, mime etc. are some of the characteristics borrowed from the ancient tradition.

Although street plays began in the streets in the mid fifties, it has now become a rural phenomenon. Patronized by the NGOs working in the rural areas street plays have been quite successfully imbibed by the rural masses who have a tradition of play acting in India. Today rural forms of theatre find expression in street theatre. Forms like therukootthu, veethinatakam, tamasha, theruvunatakam, pala, chhau, bhad etc. have all been integrated into street plays. In the bottom line one notices that cultural elements like songs, dances, folk music, musical instruments etc. are the various traits of street plays.

As it is a rural phenomenon now concrete rural issues are tackled in them. Problems of money lending, caste rivalries, superstition, lack of co-operation, minimum wages, drinking, female oppression etc. which are truly rural have been featured in these plays. Such issues are of the people and these give them enough food for thought.

Street plays are extremely cheap, unlike the mass media. A professional street play can be staged with no cost at all. All that is expected are commitment and dedication from a group of people who really want to help their people.

Street play is primarily aimed at education and awareness development. It is not a mere entertainment medium, but directed at helping the people analyse and study the situation they are in. Taking on from Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, street play practitioners use theatre as a rehearsal for revolution, i. e., preparation to change the world. Empowering the powerless and marginalized becomes the primary motto of theatre in their hands.[4]

Seen from all these points of view street play today is one of the best examples of alternative media, as it contains in itself all the elements of a complete alternative media.

Street plays need not always be revolutionary, and crying hoarse on rebellion. Christian values can also be very powerfully communicated through the street play. In fact there have been attempts to recreate and rephrase the gospel stories, parables and other events from the life of Christ in the street play format. Viswajyoti Communications run by the IMS fathers in Benares have tried to put across the parables in a street play format.

Media Education as An Alternative Action

But then what should be one's attitude to the mainstream media, which are all-pervading? It is in this context that Media Education becomes an important alternative action.

In *Aetatis Novae*, Pope John Paul II said, "the role of the Christian media practitioner is to evangelize the media" (439). Definitely the Pope did not use the term in the traditional sense. He meant three things: 1. Let Christians grow up to be professional media persons that they are respected media consultors in any country, 2. Train lay people with deep faith, in the media so that they can get into important positions in the secular media. 3. Last, but no means least Pope wanted Christians to put a soul into the secular media, by making these more value conscious. To do this media education is the means he proposes, i.e., making people critically aware of the media and its ways. Thus one of the primary concerns of the Church in media today is Media Education.

Why is it so important in India?

If the Church cannot care for the poorest in today's India it has no reason to exist at all. The poor have been much victimized by the media. They are not cared by the media as they have no purchasing power and media want only to use them as long as they can buy what the media sell. Due to their illiteracy and lack of awareness they have been made grist to the consumeristic mill of the media, exploiting them at every stage. It is essential that in the first place the church becomes aware of the need to develop alternative media of communications. The poor become extremely susceptible grist to the mill of the media.

Media Education is seen as an important thrust in the Catholic Church today. India today faces a variety of challenges posed by the media explosion. Films and TV programmes have

invaded Indian homes. These spawn a new culture altogether. The values these new media subtly propagate are diametrically opposed to, not merely Christian but even to Indian values. Glorifying violence and sex, belittling marital commitments, stereo typing women as sex objects, projecting material well-being as the goal of human life, increasing consumerism and conspicuous consumption, portraying western modes as superior to indigenous forms making universal models of media stars, creating a hunger for clothes, cosmetics and junk food, everything negative possible through the media is highlighted. It is important that the positive use of media be amply enhanced. Media Education tries to look at the media critically and help its consumers make the best use of it for the betterment of their lives.

Media Education as a subject is quite new in India. And it was the Christian communicators who started the notion of Media Education in the country.

What is Media Education?

Media Education is a process of education to become critically aware of the ways the various media influence our thinking, affect our value system and change our society; that we in turn become critical and discerning receivers of the media messages, and are enabled to respond to media creations and manipulations in a creative way that will help the education and development of our society.

Media Education presupposes media awareness and media literacy. Media awareness recognizes the presence of the media around us and realizes that media have definite roles to play in society.

Media literacy is more or less education in the grammar or the technique of media production.

The concept of Media Education began to develop in Christian circles in the early seventies when Chitra Bani, founded by Gaston Roberge a French Canadian Jesuit began to invite teachers and students to critically study and analyze films. His book, *Mass Communications and Man* may be the first attempt to introduce the impact of media and films in particular to the general audience. Around this time Xavier Institute of Communications Arts, Bombay which specialized in academic, technical courses too began to impart media analysis classes to students. Amruthavani

in Secunderabad, Culture and Communication in Madras too began to take to Media Education in sporadic ways.

Initially the thrust of these courses was to introduce the grammar, i. e. the techniques and skills of the media and from there to see how these can be essential tools, in complementing academic education. Attempts have been made to understand and assimilate communication and media skills.

Over the past five years under the larger umbrella of Unda/ OCIC, the media wings of the Catholic Church, there has been keen interest in studying and developing the concept of media education from the Indian context. Persistent efforts brought the media educators in contact with a number of international experts on the subject. Right now a concrete effort is on to start media education at all levels: Schools, Colleges, Sunday schools, NGO sectors, seminaries, formation houses etc.

Inspite of all our efforts, media education has only just begun in the country. Recently at a national conference on media education at which a number of experts on the media from university as well as government sectors took part, it was very evident to us that media education as a subject is very new to the country and the little that we have started needs to be strengthened and popularized.

Why is Media Education an Important Subject Today?

Media in India are considered mostly a tool for entertainment among the upper classes. Enormous amount of capital is spent on entertainment, while a large number of people live under subhuman conditions. What is worse, the glamour of the media appeals so much to these poor people that they can forget their lives, their families and their basic human needs and be glued to the media. Media as entertainment can really brainwash them, lead them astray. Such gross mishandling of mass media can be controlled only if the people become conscious of the way media are used by the media controllers. The people need to take action against the gross mishandling of media for purely enhancing product sale, geared to the advancement of a consumer culture.

Another reason for the importance of media education today is the forceful media explosion in these years. Even in the rural areas media have made impact as never before. No doubt,

today media is the most simple phenomenon that has the greatest influence on people's thinking and their lives. Media education has definitely become the need of the hour and the Church needs to step into this in a major way. The Church needs to give an important thrust to media as an educational tool that has definite bearings on the way one lives, the values one needs to cultivate and the cultural changes that affect people.

II. Cinema: A Tool for Evangelisation

It is natural that we encounter a number of people in the Church who cannot accept that cinema has any role to play in society, not to say anything about its role in the Church. Obviously they are reflecting the old tradition in the church when it looked at the media in general with suspicion. The church has grown through an age of critical control (Legion of Decency, USA, 1930) of the media in imitation of and competition with the media. Now the church is keen to try and encourage the best in the media for its own evangelical work. When the Pope speaks of evangelizing the media today in *Aetatis Novae* (1991),[5] he has very much this concept in mind. Harvey Cox had earlier made it simpler when he argued in *The Secular City*, that the Kingdom of God necessarily is not in Christianity or in the Church itself, but out there in the secular, and he asked Christians to learn to be "kingdom-spotters"[6] in a secular world. Earlier Pope Paul VI had pointed out in *Evangelium Nuntiandi* (1975)[7] that the Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims from the housetops the message of which she is the depository.

With such strong injunctions from the Church how could Christian leaders keep themselves away from the media, one fails to understand.

However, when one dares to comment on the role of cinema in evangelization, and speak of attempts at picturising the life of Christ, saints and religious events one has an understanding of evangelization, as if it is an attempt at making people believe in the primacy of Christ, Christian religion and the saints. This, evidently, is one aspect of evangelization which traditionalists hold dear. I shall dwell on it for some time before I proceed to a

newer, broader understanding of evangelization and the way cinema contributes to it.

A cursory glance at the films of the past shows that among the Christian characters, cinema has concentrated more on Jesus, Francis of Assisi and Joan of Arc. The fact that these characters appear most in cinema is a clear indication that cinema always looks for something marvellous, exciting and dramatic. Jesus' story with the miracles, crucifixion and resurrection has tremendous dramatic potential. Joan of Arc's exploits as a disguised soldier waging war against a mighty army and the little Poverello's renunciation have unbelievable possibilities. And these are the stuff that cinema is made of.

Quite clearly, there are many films on saints including the recent *Marie Di Nazareth.* But I do not think it worthwhile to recount all the attempts at recreating the Christian mystique on celluloid, as some of these films do not throw much light on the spiritual illuminations that turn mortals into saints and reformers. Any one who has seen Liliana Cavani's *Francesco* with Micky Rourke as Francis Assisi will understand what I mean. There have even been films that strongly denounced the mystique of Christian religion as in Jean Luc Godard's *Mary, Mother of God,* Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Antonia Bird's *The Priest.* But then that is another story.

There are a few important Christian films that need to be discussed in the context of evangelization. But before that it is more important to ask whether popular films on Christian themes help evangelization at all?

The Potential of the Medium

Cinema like any other mass medium is suited to give wholesome entertainment and information and some inspiration. I do not include education, because this presupposes that the viewer or audience has the ability to discern and separate truth from falsehood, fact from fiction, and actuality from exaggeration. In a country like India where people are illiterate they are not able to make this difference while they watch films. Besides, lack of any media education makes people believe that what is shown on the screen is true and is acceptable. So in the process cinema can supply people with opinions and ideas on every subject. And these impressions shape their lives and values.

So undoubtedly, there can be tremendous influence of cinema on people's lives. Not only the younger generation, but even elderly people are attracted by the charm of the movies. The popularity of special *manrams* and fan clubs for film stars in Tamil Nadu, cine stars turning national leaders etc. are indications that the common people have acceded to the tremendous potential of films in their lives. As for youngsters, imitating film stars and their fashions and moulding their lives according to what is available on the media are clear indications that the world created by the media do influence people beyond reasonable limits.

Cinema as Proclaiming Christian Ideals Directly

Let me look at some Christian films that have really helped shape a concept of Christianity. As already mentioned, the most filmed story is that of Christ himself. It is reported that Dada Saheb Phalke, the founder of Indian cinema was influenced by films on the Bible and the life of Christ as early as 1910 in Europe. Hollywood went on to recreate the magic a number of times with different actors and directors. Cecille B. De Mille and George Stevens have tried spectacular ventures *Ten Commandments* and *Greatest Story Ever Told* respectively. John Huston's magnum opus *The Bible* for all its opulence failed to capture the essence of the book, i. e., God's unconditional love. These films and others like *Ben Hur, The Robe, Quo Vadis, Samson and Delilah*, have spread knowledge about the Biblical characters far and wide. And in this sense these have been successful evangelizers. But the films that probably have educated, inspired and helped evangelization may be fewer. Let me single out Zeffirelli's television serial *Jesus of Nazareth* (*JON*) and Pier Paolo Passolini's *Gospel According to St. Matthew.*

Any one who has gone through the experience of watching *JON* will surely know that it is an inspired production. I am reminded of an event which Zeffirelli quoted while receiving a special award for *JON* at the American Academy of Motion Pictures. Before *JON,* Zeffirelli, a devout Catholic, had to his credit mostly films like "Brother Sun Sister Moon" on the early life of Francis Assisi and St. Claire. German, Italian and US television networks had approached him with an offer to make a teleserial on the life of Jesus. Zeffirelli refused them all saying that he did not know Jesus sufficiently well to do justice

to his life. One night while Zeffirelli was sleeping he dreamt and in the dream Jesus asked him how far he had gone ahead with that film on his life. Zeffirelli replied: "I haven't yet given it a second thought, I just can't do it. I am incapable of it". And Jesus replied: "You can, with me behind you." Next morning Zeffirelli rang the Italian network and the rest, Zeffirelli concluded, you have seen and appreciated.

Obviously, one can perceive this divine inspiration in more than one sequence in JON. Every time I watch it with new groups I have been pleasantly surprised to find new interpretations. Several times I used it for prayer sessions and reflections. Zeffirelli's research is quite factual, and the divine personality of Jesus emerges very powerfully through Robert Powell's performance as well as through the slight nuances of the Zeffirelli script.

Pasolini's Jesus is more mundane and everyday person. And that itself is the power of the film. One can easily identify Jesus as a working-class-man, living in the suburbs of Rome and mouthing Marxian monologues that sound sensible to idealists and challenge the establishment that thrives on corruption and other evil practices. These films give us more than information. It probes us to reflect and sometimes change our lives. And this is probably the essence of evangelization.

Indian Attempts

In India Christian films are mostly made in South India, in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada. Of the five or six films made in Vijay Chander's *Karunamayudu* in Telugu dubbed into a number of languages including Hindi (*Daya Sagar*) is prabably the most popular. That briefly sums up the quality of other films, made in the South. As melodrama and sentimental scenes rule the roost in Indian cinema it has been difficult at all for the film makers to exploit the Christ story at will. *Daya Sagar* itself is dramatically trite, with the popular hero and villain syndrome, and other items like dances and sundry ingredients that go to make a hit.

A recent attempt in Kannada *Bhuvana Jyothi* too was liked as it was mostly a dance drama on Jesus.

Besides the life of Christ Christian religious films too have been made: *Annai Velanganni* (Our Lady of Velanganni), *Snapaka Yohannan* (John the Baptist), *Sr. Alphonsa*. All these films have

served to give an exaggerated informative sketch of the saint concerned. What strikes as most significant is the recent children's film *Johnny* by the Salesians which depicts very creatively the childhood of Don Bosco.

Religious Films

A Christian religious film need not necessarily have Jesus or any one of the saints or Christian situations as the main subject. There are several other attempts at interpreting the Christian message in symbolic, inculturated film language.

There are what are called theological, spiritual and religious films reflecting deep Christian themes. Luis Bunuel's (Mexico) *Nazarin, Viridiana* and *Los Olvidados* are excellent examples of recreating the Christian myth in cultural idioms. In *Nazarin* he explores the life of a priest who travels from village to village teaching the Christian virtues of love, compassion, forgiveness and resignation. Robert Bresson (France) has always been associated with deeply religious films. His *Diary of a Country Priest* studies a Christ-like Catholic priest. *Au Hazard, Balathazar* has a central Christ figure. a donkey and its owner, a poor country girl. These films have made inroads into understanding Christian spirituality. Every film of Ingmar Bergman's is a toast to Christian virtues, exemplified in rare cinematic terms. His *Virgin Spring* very beautifully underscores the Christian meaning of sin, repentance and forgiveness. Similarly Fellini's *La Strada* has a strong Christ image in the lady clown. Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* is again religious symbolism cinematographed. Recently, Andre Tarchowsky and Krystoff Kieslowski have extended the spiritual realm through their films.

Tarchowsky's films are highly theological. His *Sacrifice* for example uses symbols of Christian hope and Japanese ideograms to link nature and God in such grandeur that he is able to effortlessly pose questions about life and its ultimate end. Keislosky's *Decalogue* is an attempt at interpreting the Ten Commandments in the modern context. Everyone of the ten television films exemplifies the commandments in a way that the modern man can identify with. For example, the first film shows how a computer wizard father errs, when he trusts too much on the computer to predict the weather conditions and in the process kills his own son. The computer had become his God. Denis

Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal* is probably one film that gained the attention of the secular as well as the religious world for being too clever. It is a modern theological interpretation of Mark's Gospel and highlights the spiritual ills that mark modern society in this cultivated Western World. Arcand also very successfully points an accusing finger at decadent Church values and modern advertising and media management.

Several other films like *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan) *Commina Commina* (Ermano Olmi), *Tender Mercies* (Bruce Beresford), *Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel), *The Mission* (Roland Joffe), etc. have very strong religious content. In the wake of such films, it is important to rethink the whole concept and gamut of evangelization. For these films do a great service to humanity which needs to be subtly acknowledged.

For a start, these films make one reflect on the content and intent unlike other religious films recounted earlier. These are highly artistic and done by some of the best film makers, as a result, their reach is to high circles, not necessarily the popular audience. It is in such a context, that I like to look at the new meaning of evangelization.

Evangelisation as a Broader Subject

Evangelisation after Vatican II has to be understood in a much broader context. And it is in this broad context that films have contributed excellent service. The essence of evangelization is conversion or change of heart. A person acting in a certain wrong or evil way, if prompted to change his ways freely and accept a morally right way, can be said to be going through a conversion. It is a turning back from something that previously held the person captive. This can be done only through certain rational certitude, which evidently needs intellectual assent. Therefore reflecting about a film after watching it, is a must for a change of heart. In this sense, purely entertaining or informative films may not be considered to be great assets, because such films are forgotten after the moments of enjoyment. Hence it is often noticed that film makers serve the first half with pure entertainment and the second half with subtle moralizing. Or in the case of modern American films the entire film can be satirical and through humour very serious matters regarding life and relationships are exposed, our facades are broken thoroughly.

Another important issue is that any film that has deep moral value, that challenges and urges a self examination for the better can be said to be in the realm of evangelization. And it is about this type of film that I like to discuss further and in the Indian context.

What gives Films a Certain Seriousness of Purpose?

There are certain things that are essential to make a film touch one deeply. I like to call the first involvement or identification. When we watch a film if we can be totally lost in it, there is some kind of identification going on. This identification is involvement. At the end of the film whatever happens to the main character with whom we have identified may affect our lives too. This is a simple argument regarding evangelization. Often a film that has a realistic leading character, with whom a person begins to identify can surely affect him. And if this character has certain virtues to speak of, his influence can be positive and may be called evangelical.

Seen from this perspective let me recount some Indian films that have raised a taste of godliness in me. I can never forget watching Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* with subdued emotion. Here was the film unreeling a noble life living out the value of Christ, embracing non-violence, tolerance, love, peace. The film was worthily honoured around the world and the message of Gandhi found an acceptance the world over. Unlike a film on Christ by Hollywood magnates this film was more austere, down to earth and captured the soul of a fakir very sensitively. It was much like watching Zeffirelli's *JON* in many respects. Another important film that really ennobled me was Shyam Benegal's *Manthan.* Here was a film that was made with the support of 500,000 farmers of Gujarat, each contributing one rupee, on their plight. The film acts like a role play for the rural audience as it unveils for them how they can with local initiative and support alone muster enough courage to form a milk cooperative and throw off the burden of the exploitative local contractors. Here again it is the realism with which the situations are looked at that really delivers the message powerfully. This to me is again evangelization as it opens hope and the willingness to try again.

There are other films too that have helped my own understanding of people, situations and events in a sharp way. As a

missionary in North India, a lot of my growth I would attribute to such films. I can vividly remember watching Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (Bengali) while I was 18 in a film appreciation class way back in 1973. That film has hardly anything to do with my Christian faith, but it did touch my being, my faith. For those who have not seen this gem of a human document, the struggles of living in rural Bengal, in the grip of poverty, and the agonies of the life pangs of the two children are, briefly heart rending. The film did help me to find in these struggles, the struggles of the people of rural Bihar, for whom I had decided to give my life. The struggles of the central characters showed me how people in North Indian villages have several things to suffer. It really prepared me to face the worst in life. And this has remained a philosophy of my life ever since.

Nirmalyam (Malayalam) was another film that challenged my faith and further prepared me to face the challenges as a missionary. Here the meaninglessness of depending on God and his graces when man is dwarfed by human sufferings struck me deep. The story of the tempie priest who devoutly offers daily prayers to his deity was intriguing to a missionary who is used to telling people to depend on God even if the heavens collapse, trust in his benevolent mercies come what may. In this film it was shown that in spite of all his trust, poverty had eaten from within, his son had turned an atheist, his daughter had run away with a revolutionary and his wife was having an affair with a kafir. The end result challenged my own attitudes towards evangelization.

Another Malayalam film that came across to me as deeply spiritual is Aravindan's *Esthappan*. It was Aravindan's attempt to give an audio visual expression to the Jesus myth much rampant in Kerala. Obviously one never notices Jesus anywhere, but the central character in his sincerity, bluntness, spontaneity and matter of factness resembles Christ. His various actions too can be easily associated to Jesus. The Franciscan Communications in California made a short film called *Aime* very much in the same manner about a young woman photographer who moves around with the poorest and thus have to sacrifice her life on the altar of the rich and powerful people's avarice, much like Christ.

Watching a film of this sort gives us the feeling that Jesus, after all is not an unattainable character, but one like us. This feeling is indeed greatly evangelical.

Watching *Jai Santhosi Maa* (Hindi) was another landmark in my life. I still remember watching the film in a dingy Bombay theatre in 1974, and people: women, children and even grown ups running out from the aisles with handful of flowers and other things to offer to the goddess who had just appeared on the screen. And there were scores of other real people climbing on to the screen kissing, cajoling, caressing the goddess, accompanied by thunderous applause from the audience. This experience in fact helped me respect their religiosity (although some may call it superstition, but then is not superstition the name we give to another man's faith?) It challenged my own desire to evangelize in the traditional way and helped me respect other religions.

Another film that portrayed for me the reality of being a poor tribal, dependent on others was evident in Govind Nihlani's *Aakrosh* (Hindi). This film hit me as never before as it revealed very subtly that being a poor man you are always at the receiving end, mercy and justice always denied, and there is no possibility of truth for such. This is the reality that rural India, the missionary's domain is made of.

Yes, there are several films that have hit me between the eyes, made me think from gut level and in the course my own attitudes.

Film Education Itself is Evangelization

I have earlier spoken about media education and film analysis. These are very important areas in these times. When I watch the continuous outflow of mindless movies from our film factories, and their tremendous sway over young minds, I have often felt that helping them realize how these films can misguide them, dictate their lives, values and beliefs is in itself a kind of evangelization today.

The Church and Cinema

Before I close let me make some comments on the Church and cinema. After initial hesitation, the Church has related pretty well with the cinema. She has accepted cinema as a rare gift of God and has urged the Church leaders to utilize it to the

full. She knows that the cinema can be an important medium to disseminate values. Priests and missionaries have relied heavily on Biblical and Christian films of value for teaching. The OCIC missionary service has documented films in order to constantly help Church personnel use them in catechesis, in community apostolates and for healthy entertainment.

Films have been found to favour good causes around the world. Films like *Dr. Zhivago, Chariots of Fire, My Fair Lady, Sound of Music, Schlindler's List, ET, Colour Purple, The Wizard of Oz, Fiddler on the Roof* etc. have been liked and admired for their sense of values as well as their entertainment quality.

And finally, let me strike a note of hope for the future too. Many believe that audience love to watch films that depict sex and violence and these succeed most. This is not true. If you don't believe me, look at the most successful films of recent years in India. *Hum Aap Ke Hain Kaun?, Bombay, Raja Hindusthani, Pardes* are much liked for the varied family and social situations depicted there. These films are well intentioned and catering to public taste. These are wholesome entertainment with relevant messages, too. Yes, our audience gives us some hope, as do our filmmakers. There is a sense of faith growing in our people.

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Pastoral Communications

Jude Botelho

Pastoral Communication, says the author, is communication giving direction to people's lives, showing them the way to God, offering spiritual guidance. This is a very important task of the church. However, people today are in a fascinating new media world which seems to usurp the place of the church because the communicative style of the latter has become listless and unappealing. The article outlines the various ways in which the church has used the media down the ages which in fact corresponded to the ecclesiology — the church's self-understanding — of the times. The features of various methods — institutional / teaching, heralding, sacramental, communion, dialogue and community — are described, which give insightful information about them. In this context, the reader's attention is called to Jesus' style of communication — through stories — which was very effective. The modern media are also telling stories, says the author. Then the article depicts some of the positive contributions of the media — like fast information-diffusion, mass-education possibility, entertainment etc., — as well as negative effects — like idealization of violence, pornography, sexual exploitation, consumerism, etc. Here the importance of media education is stressed. It consists in helping people to become aware of the potential and power of the media, understand the operative methods of the media, create alternative media, evaluate the media and so on, explains the author.

In one of Tony D'Mello's Book there is a story told of a young man who used to practice parachuting daily and after sometime he was quite good at it. One day while he was practicing there was a heavy wind and he was blown far away from the field where he usually landed. He was carried miles away until at last he landed in a tree. Much as he tried, he could not extricate himself and there he was, hanging by the parachute, waiting

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Fr. Jude, a specialist in mass media, is in charge of the 'Commission for Social Communications' of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. He also travels extensively in India and abroad giving lectures and conducting programmes about the mass media.

for help. Finally he saw a man coming towards the tree, and as the man came right below the tree, the parachutist wanting to know where exactly he had landed asked him: "Where am I?" The man below looked up and said; "You are in a tree". Smiling, the parachutist, looked down and said: "Excuse me, but are you a priest? The man, who was actually a priest, was much surprised that he had been recognized, and he said: "I am a priest, but how did you know that I was a priest?" The parachutist said very simply: "Well Father, what you said earlier, the information you gave me was absolutely true but absolutely useless!"

The story should help us to reflect and ask ourselves, especially, we who are in the pastoral ministry: How are we communicating to the people? Perhaps what we say is absolutely true, but may be absolutely useless for their lives! Which brings us to the question why is there such a great interest in communications in the Church today? We cannot deny that more and more people are getting interested in communication. But if we were to seek the reason we would find a variety of causes for this new interest in communication.

Some are getting interested because, in the face of the onslaught of the media, they feel totally helpless, they feel outdated and would like to do something to remedy this situation. Then again there would be some who feel that the media are bad, that the media are evil, that they are spoiling our people. As the church has traditionally looked upon itself as the guardian of morality, it would like to do something to save the people from the media and to counteract the manipulations of the media as well. Then again there are others who feel that the media are replacing the Church. At one time the church was all-powerful, it was all-important and it exercised great influence on the lives of the people. Today the same cannot be said. The church is no longer in power, and it is fast loosing ground and importance. Infact, if a church service is arranged at the same time as a popular movie on TV, there are chances that more people will attend the movie than come to church! So the church authorities have constantly to make adjustments to see that the media which occupy so much of time of the people, are taken into account.

Still other reasons could be that some of the church personnel realize that they are no more relevant. They speak a

language which people do not seem to understand. They seem to be addressing needs that somehow are not relevant today. Therefore they feel the need of entering into the media because the media somehow seem to be speaking the language of the people and meeting their immediate needs. There are still others who realize that while the media have made progress by leaps and bounds, and there are constantly newer, more significant and powerful means of communication, in the church we have been using very traditional means. People today feel the need of updating, of learning newer means of communication to help them in their task as communicators of the Good News.

One of the most important reasons that we should take into account is that today, people live in a new media world. If as Christians they have to respond to this new media age then the church has to find an adequate and meaningful response to the media. Perhaps, there is a need for a new Evangelism, which is done in, through and with the media.

To respond in a creative and meaningful way to the media world of today what we need to do is firstly to become aware of this media world. It might sound strange but though we live surrounded by the media, very often, we are ignorant and oblivious about this world. I remember a Professor of communication who spoke of his own experience. He was an English man and he was involved with his work. Being a family man, in the evening he would sit at dinner with his family and spend time with his sons and daughters. As he listened to them he discovered that they spoke about things that mattered to them, but he found it difficult to follow what they were talking about. They almost seemed to be talking another language because they were full of the things they had seen on TV, the movies they had watched and the songs they had heard. Their reality was the media world! It was then he realized that in order to understand his own children he would need to watch television to see the movies and programmes that they were seeing. By doing so, he became aware of this New World, their world, which helped him to interact better with his own family.

The media are becoming more and more powerful and we know that every one comes under the spell of the media, young and old, parents and children. elders and youth, they are all there,

in the all-encompassing embrace of the media. People are fascinated by what the media have to offer, be it Radio, Television, Cinema or even the old fashioned Theatre and Drama. It is always entertaining. It is always speaking our language, It is talking about our lives. This fascination somehow becomes an addiction and people today spend more and more time watching the movies, glued to the television set and as they watch more and more, they slowly imbibe the values, the culture and lifestyles that are projected by the media. This is quiet evident if we were to look at the way people live their lives today; we can see that time itself is structured by the viewing habits of people.

When we look at the people's lifestyle there is so much of imitation, especially among the young of what they see and hear and experience in the media world. People's habits are fast changing, traditional values are given up and there are questions asked. Questions that were never thought of before and never voiced in public. Traditional authority is questioned and no more respected. Parental figures, school authority and society itself is challenged by the lives of people who are influenced by the media.

There are specific areas where perhaps we see the power and the influence of the media. One of the running themes in most of the movies on television is Violence. A film hardly sells if there is no violence, if it is not spiced with some scenes of violence. As people continue to view violence on the screen, surely it is having some effect on their life. We see especially in children and youth, a streak of aggression setting in. Their games become violent and are sometimes daring. As the movies propose violence as a solution to the problems of life, we see imitation in so many ways of this fact in daily life. Violence seems to be an easy and quick solution to life's daily problems as proposed by television. If you watch a short serial, or a movie, in half-an-hour, or at the most in a couple of hours, the story is told, the problems are solved often through violence. When this is glorified in the films, people come to believe that we can do the same in life itself, and so vengeance, revenge and hitting back become a way of life.

The second theme that runs on a parallel track is Sex. Just as violence has become part and parcel of every film, we find that sex now is the staple diet of most films. People seem to demand

more and more of it, are thrilled and titillated by scenes that portray sex and sexual mores often very openly. Here again the younger generation, which is targeted, living and consuming a daily diet of movies that display sex, naturally are going to be influenced by it. Traditional values and the respect shown for sex, for women are fast disappearing. The woman is seen to be an object of sex and this is not only in the movies but also more especially in advertisement. The consequence of this is that any relationship is seen as the means of having sex and surveys done in our college campus show that young people feel that having sex is a natural consequence of any relationship not necessarily a commitment for life.

Besides these two running themes, there is a whole lifestyle of consumerism that is purveyed by the media. The media portray successful persons as people with a lot of wealth, as people who have all the luxuries of life. To be a success is equated with having a lot of the luxuries of life. The hero and heroine are generally depicted as rich, and if they are not, they are constantly doing whatever they are busy with in order to have what the rich have. This consumerist trend is of course projected by the advertisements that we see constantly on television. We know that the whole movie and television industry is supported by advertisements. Advertisements, while they do give us some information of products, are all the time creating newer needs by selling us newer and newer products. The hunger grows and we become a society that consumes and discovers a voracious appetite for things that we believe are absolutely essential to live life fully.

The media have become powerful because people listen, more and more, to what the media have to offer and thus the lives of the people are controlled and manipulated by the media. We have to admit that the media could have a negative Influence on society if people do not become intelligent and critical users of the media.

But there is also the other side of the picture. There is so much of power and potential for good that the media can exercise over our people. While we have seen the negative side, we also need to acknowledge the positive side.

On the positive side we see first of all how today's children are far better informed than those of a generation earlier. Even

at a young age they know so much more precisely because they have the radio, television and the cinema to educate them. The media play the role of educators and people of all ages learn very much. The way of education is changed because through powerful visuals, a lot of useful information is conveyed to the masses. Not only do children get educated but also literacy is spread throughout the country and information is disseminated through the media in an effective, efficacious and appealing manner.

Secondly, because of the media we get instantaneous news, what is called live-coverage. When events of international or national importance take place, immediately, almost at the same time, we learn about them, we see them, we witness them happening and therefore the media offer up-to-date information of our world.

Thirdly, the media have re-created and expanded the boundaries of our world. Marshall McLuhan spoke of the world as a Global village. The TV channels which are viewed all over the world are creating a new global culture. The TV experience is the great common denominator. Anyone, anywhere around the world can watch the media, and everyone can have a common shared experience at the same time. We were all witness to the mass viewership of Diana's funeral and that of Mother Teresa's which united people as never before in the history of humankind. Therefore the media can serve to unite people through sharing of a common human experience.

Fourthly, the media also can raise the consciousness level and be a very important factor in social action. It can be the eye or the conscience of the country, helping us to focus on social issues. Today, for example there is so much of awareness of aids precisely because of the media campaigns that focus on this issue. Whenever there are problems of world magnitude, through the media, where our consciousness is heightened, we are forced to respond to these issues. The whole attention of the world can be focussed on these issues, and together as one people we can act for good, for the unity of progress of humankind.

One of the roles the media fulfill best is that of entertaining us and this is a valuable and an important contribution though it may not seem so. The trials and difficulties of life oppress

people, and each day for many is a burden. If there was no means to relieve that burden, we would breakdown very soon. It is here that the media play a very important role of entertaining people, of relieving their tension and thus helping them to cope, to forget life's miseries, sometimes for an hour or two, so that they can get back to life with renewed vigour.

One last positive role that we see the media fulfilling very well is that of providing inspiration and role models. All of us can remember great movies, uplifting media experiences that we had years ago. Very often, when a movie has touched us very deeply, we remember the movie for years. We can recall scenes, dialogues, and the people who were somehow models of what we would like to be and what we would like to do in life. This was traditionally, the role of religion, to inspire and raise men to noble heights. But we see that today, the media are doing what religion should be doing, offering models of inspiration, offering solace and strength and lifting up people's gaze to the higher things of life that help us to live our daily lives meaningfully.

The question that could be asked is: Have the Media replaced the Church? Is the Church relevant today? Can the Church do something about the media challenges that confront us and our people?

On the one hand we have to admit that the Church and the media perhaps are on two different tracks. While the Church stresses the traditional the media dwell on the modern. The Church lays emphasis on the past but the media are busy with current happenings. While the Church looks at what is stable and lasting, the media look at what is ever changing. Again while the Church discourages novelty and sensation, the media thrive on the sensational. Therefore in a certain sense, we are in a difficult situation and yet we have to respond to this dilemma.

What could be the response to the challenges and opportunities offered by the media? For that matter what has been the response of the church to the media? A historical perspective will help us to situate our response today.

Let us look at how the church has responded to the media. We see that in the earliest times the church exercised tremendous authority on people. It was the centre of learning and a power to

be reckoned with. As the media started growing and as people started becoming more and more literate, people started reading a lot of books from sources, which were not earlier available to them. They started questioning authority and posed a threat to the Church. The first reaction of the church was to look at the media with suspicion. It was scared and frightened because its monopoly was lost Since the media, particularly the press and popular media, did not originate from the church, they were looked on as evil and sometimes even condemned as the work of the devil! In this first phase the church looked down at the media and even condemned people who were getting involved in the media. This was the time when rules and regulations stipulated what people should and should not read. The Index and censorship came into being, and even today the church does sometimes exercise this role.

Historically we see that this attitude of the church did not influence or deter the people at all as the press became more powerful and the newspapers became common in the society. As Radio became popular and as cinema and television became people's main entertainment, the church slowly realized that the media were not altogether bad. They did seem to have something that was good in them. Besides, whether they condemned it or not, people still enjoyed and patronized the popular media.

In this second phase the church realized that perhaps the media could be harnessed and utilized by the church as a means of evangelization. The church gradually started using these very means as tools for evangelization and so the church had its own newspaper beginning with *La Osservatore Romano.* The church began its own Radio station with Vatican Radio and it started using television and cinema to communicate the Good News. Thus the second stage was that of getting into the media, of competing, and using every modern means available for evangelization. This stage carried on for a long time. This opened the doors for the media to enter, as it were, the church and for people to indulge in all kinds of experiments with the media.

Today we have reached the third phase in the church's response to the media. The document *Aetatis Novae,* proposes a new way of looking at the media in which we do not condemn everything in the media as bad, nor do we indiscriminately use and mimic the media. *Aetatis Novae* suggests that the media has to

be looked upon not merely as tools, as instruments of evangelization but that the whole media world, the media environment itself needs to be evangelized. If we are to evangelize the media world, then we have to enter into this media world, use the media with discrimination and reach out to the media professionals, with compassion and respect, so that the means themselves are evangelized.

We could again look at the church in its use of the media from the view of Ecclesiology. Avery Dulles proposes six models of church which could be examined to see how we have responded to the media from the way we experience our church.

The first model is the Teacher or the Institutional model. If we look at the church as an authority, as a divine institution then we see that all power is exercised from top, it becomes more important to give people right ideas, correct doctrine, concise and precise answers. Faith is seen as intellectual assent. Only the Teaching authority can give right answers and correct doctrine. This model is still in operation in the church. When you look at the church from this view-point then we see that communication becomes a means of teaching, a means of giving answers, a means by which those in authority communicate to those who are subject. This kind of model of the church favours oral communication and the print media: The Institutional and Teaching church has published books of catechism, books of doctrine, the teaching of the church, the dogmas, the documents of the church and the encyclicals of the Pope. All the catechism books flourished when the church was looked upon as a teaching authority and today too there is a role for the teaching church.

The second model is that of being the Herald, the preaching church. We see there was an era when this model flourished and perhaps in many areas the church still looks at itself as missionary. The emphasis has been on preaching, on the oral tradition and this has given rise to the great orders of preachers, to the emphasis on oratory, to the Sunday Sermon, to the whole Bible ministry of the Church. The preaching church, in the area of communication, sparked off the printing and distribution of the Bible and the tradition of preaching missions, retreats, and Sunday sermons.

The third model of the Church is the Sacramental model. We know that sacraments are moments of special encounter with God and signs that speak of this deeper reality symbolizing thisencounter

with God. The church itself is looked upon as a Sacrament. This was the age when the fine arts flourished in the church. Song and music, architecture and painting, all the arts were seen as means to create the environment and symbolize the meeting and presence of God. We see this especially during the Middle Ages when the church became the patron of art.

The fourth model of the Church is the Communion or Mystical body Model. This model came into its own especially with the Vatican Council, the time when relationships became more and more important, when the whole idea of belonging to one family was important and the need for interpersonal relationship came into the fore. The church is viewed as one Body, as the Mystical body of Christ. As the church grew in numbers and expanded, its members felt lost in the growing multitudes. This loss of identity and of the sense of belonging gave rise to the need to communicate, the need to commune, the need to belong to the Church. This was the age of the small Christian communities, the basic communities and group retreats.

The fifth model of the Church is that of the Dialogic model, which reflects the Church in the world of today. This model was propounded by the Vatican II Document on the Church in the Modern world. The Church realizes that it no more has the monopoly of goodness and truth. While the church follows Christ, there are many people who follows other paths to God, a variety of religions, a variety of ways to reach out to God. The Church acknowledges that the goodness of God is prevalent in every religion and hence the Church has to be in dialogue and constant relationship with all men of goodwill.

This model ofcourse stresses every means of communication both traditional and modern that would facilitate this dialogue. It looks at communication as a collaborative effort, using every means to build relationships, moving out of its structures to work with people, to work with secular sources, to work with NGO groups, to work with all people who are working for the progress and development of mankind. The emphasis is on networking, on collaboration, on sharing our resources rather than on creating parallel church structures for communication.

To the above five models, Avery Dulles, in the recent past, added a sixth model, namely, the Church as a Community of

disciples. This model in a sense encompasses all the previous models, while laying stress on Discipleship as the hallmark of the church today. Going back to its roots, we notice that the Church stood out as different from the society of those days. Looking at the early Christian community, others were forced to remark: "Look at those Christians, see how they love one another."

These models of the Church help us to understand how the church has changed and how the church has used communication down through the ages? We have looked at the history of the church's response to the media, we have also seen different models of the church and how these have coloured the church's use of communication.

We could ask ourselves: Is there a need of Pastoral Communication? Is what the Church does in the communication sphere satisfactory or has there to be a change?

There is doubt that the situation has changed today and a meaningful response, as we have pointed out earlier, has to be made to the challenge of the media revolution. For that matter, can we say that church communication is in any way different from any other communication? Is it just the same? Is there such a thing as Religious communication? What is it that makes it religious communication? Is it the content of the communication that makes it religious? Is it the initiator of communication, the programme director, the director of a movie, the producer that makes the product religious? These are questions that need to be asked and there could be again a variety of responses.

Religious communication is not merely a sharing of religious information. We have plenty of means of offering information on religion and these are sometimes necessary, but that does not make it necessarily religious communication. Again, religious communication is not mere counselling. No doubt, there is need of counselling in the world today, people need someone to talk, people need someone to listen to them. We could do a lot of meaningful counselling and yet religious communication is not counselling alone. Again, religious communication is not social action or social activism. We cannot deny that there is need to focus and increase the awareness of people about social issues of our times but religious communication goes beyond that. Ultimately, religious communication is giving direction to people's

lives, showing them the way to God, offering spiritual guidance. It is in fact pastoral communication.

Let us look at the process of Jesus' communication in order to understand pastoral communication better. What are the attitudes that would help us to be more like Jesus Christ? In the first place we need awareness. We see Jesus as a person who is aware and there were two facets of his awareness. Firstly, in his relationship with his Father, he was constantly aware that he is the Son of the Father. "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). "I have come to do the will of my Father" (Jn. 6:38). It is in this unique relationship that he sees his truest identity of being Son. We too will be able to discover our truest identity as Christian communicators when we are aware of our relationship with our Father, when we have had the 'Abba' experience. It is precisely in and through that awareness of our identity that we can call, God our Father. This communication is heightened through our constant daily experience of God in prayer and therefore the first stage of awareness takes place in the context of prayer, the first necessary requisite for christian communication.

The second aspect of awareness is Jesus' identity with humankind. He was the Son of man, he was like us in all things but sin. St. Paul reminds us that he pitched his tent with us. "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). Jesus could understand human beings well because he was one with them in all things but sin. He had a sensitivity for all human beings especially the less fortunate of society. The Gospel reminds us constantly of his deep compassion, his deep feeling for the needs, concerns, hopes and aspirations of humankind. "He had compassion on the multitude and felt sorry for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk. 6:34). If we are to communicate meaningfully with others, we need to feel deeply with them, we need to be sensitive to them, we need to be compassionate.

Jesus' simplicity also was striking. His simplicity was seen in that he could make sublime realities understandable to children and all those simple folks who came to him. A true sign of greatness is always simplicity that is able to communicate profound thoughts in a very child like simple manner. Next, when we look at the style of Jesus Christ, we notice that he used picturesque

language, and imagery in communicating his thoughts. Constantly, when he spoke of divine realities, he would compare them to things that people were familiar. The Kingdom of God by itself not understandable was compared to a pearl of great price, to the fishing net, to the mustard seed, images rich in meaning for the people of his day. All these pictures, all these examples helped people to understand divine truths.

Again another form of communication that Jesus used powerfully was the story mode. His preaching and teaching were full of stories. We see how important this mode of communication is even today. The story appeals to all ages, to all types of people, to the rich, to the poor, to the learned and clever, to the ignorant and the simple hearted. The story always has a universal appeal. The story also becomes a very convenient tool for communicating great values. The story becomes an interactive mode by which people can interact as they tell and retell the same story and the story while becoming part of our lives, leads us on to deeper and deeper truths. Someone has said very beautifully that a man is a story telling animal. We live on stories, we live with stories and our whole life is one big story. Jesus knowing how important stories were to the people of the day, communicated constantly with stories.

Strangely enough, though we who are his disciples and followers have not learned the art of communication from Jesus Christ, it is the mass media of today that seems to have learned the lesson very well. Just as Jesus communicated with imagery, through objects and things that people were familiar with from nature and life, the mass media, the radio and the television are doing the same. They are constantly speaking in the language of pictures and sounds. Of course with television this has become a visual mode of communication, which is arresting the attention of millions of people. It is the visual that speaks most powerfully; the visuals that are from life speak to them beyond words.

We know that stories not only entertain but communicate values and Jesus knew this very well. All the values that he wanted us to imbibe, he communicated through stories. The mass media are also communicating values, values that they feel are important for their gain. We know that stories are told at leisure. Whenever we say we are going to tell a story everyone relaxes, everyone enjoys what is happening. This is what happens

to us when we are watching television, we relax, we want to enjoy the story and as we enjoy the story and relax, slowly in that moment of enjoyment and relaxation, unconsciously we are picking up the values that the media want to communicate to us.

What then would be the implications of Pastoral Communication today? How can we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ the model communicator? Is there a new way of being a communicator in the church of today? I would like to just highlight a few areas we would need to consider as we respond to the challenge of the media and the call to be communicators of this new media age.

In the first place I would think that we would have to help our people to respond to the media and all its messages that they are constantly exposed to. The way in which we can help our people would be through media education, which some have called the new Evangelization of this century.

Media Education would firstly imply helping people to be aware of the power and the potential of the media, of the impact it has and all the changes it is bringing in our lives. This can be done at all levels not only in the schools or colleges but also in our basic christian communities and all other groups. Secondly, we would need to lead them to understanding the media and how they operate, how they work. While our schools and institutions of learning stress reading and writing literacy, our children are audio-visual children and therefore, they need to learn the language of the media. The more we teach them this language the better equipped they will be to respond to the media which is the primary purpose of media education. Through this process they will become critical viewers and users of the media, able to make intelligent choices when it comes to the media. They will also gradually learn how to respond to the media and make the media accountable for what it offers to the people. Thirdly, through the process of learning media language, they will learn to create their own alternative media and use people's media and popular media for their own creative expression. They will also learn to discern both, the good that the media offers as well as be on their guard against the manipulations and the negative messages that they receive in and through the media.

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Church Documents on Communication

Jose Plachickal

Historically three attitudes can be seen in the church's approach to the media: (i) being suspicious and even condemnatory, because of the erroneous and evil effects of the media, (ii) using her own media to combat the evil effects of the secular media, which implied a challenging and combating attitude, and (iii) having a critical-appreciative attitude, when the church has shown greater understanding of the role of the media and has begun to appreciate it critically. Now the three attitudinal approaches seem to be blended (rather than the latter completely replacing the former) because they are complementary.

By its very nature Church is called to communicate. For such was the mandate given by the Lord: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Mt. 28: 19-20). The very existence of the Church depends on communicating the Good News. The disciples zealously and joyfully observed this mandate. In 1 John we read: "What we have seen and heard we are telling you so that you too may be in union with us as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this to you to make our own joy complete" (1 Jn. 1: 3-4).

The vitality of the Church depends on adapting its gospel witness to the forms of communication of a particular era. When we think of communication in connection with the Church it has to be dealt at two levels. One is its communication within itself. The other is its communication with the outside world. The Church has the duty to give directive to the faithful in their communication within the Church as well as with the outside world.

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It is in this background that the Church started giving directives on social communication.

The pronouncements Church issued from time to time reflected the ecclesiology of the time. The Church always considered Jesus Christ as the supreme self-communication of God. Lateran Council IV (1215) declared that Jesus Christ who is the Incarnate Word manifested the way of life with special clarity (DS 801). The Council of Trent (1546) saw the gospel as the source of all saving truth and moral discipline (DS 1501) and it taught that the good news is transmitted through Scripture and apostolic traditions. Vatican Council I (1870), though repeated what was said by the Council of Trent, made some advances in its teachings on revelation, faith and the magisterium. What interests us here is that Vatican I discussed how revelation is communicated to the faithful in the Church. Its significant contribution was to show the Church as a sign raised up among the nations, inviting outsiders to come to faith and at the same confirming the faith of its own members (DS 3013-14). Following the footsteps of several earlier Councils Vatican II discussed how religious knowledge is to be communicated. However, it also made fresh departures from the earlier councils. We will see the significant teachings of Vatican II at a later stage.

When we analyze the Church's documents on communication we can see different trends in its approach. Gaston Roberge SJ. author of many books on media, in an article[1] observes three different trends in the Church's attitude towards social communication and mass media. Firstly, the Church wanted to protect its faithful against the presumed or actual nefarious influence of mass media. The mass media brought in a pluralist and mass-mediated culture. It is interesting to note how the initial shock and to a certain extent hostility of the Church to the new socio-cultural reality is vividly reflected in a paragraph of the encyclical, *Mirari Vos*, published by Pope Gregory XVI on August 15, 1832:

> Here belongs that vile and never sufficiently execrated and detestable freedom of the press for the diffusion of all sorts of writings: a freedom which, with so much insistence, they dare to demand and promote. We are horrified, Venerable

1. Gaston Roberge, "Asian bishops speak up for democratic communication ', *Media Development* 1/1984, Vol. XXXI, pp. 20–23.

> Brothers, contemplating what monstrosities of doctrine, or better, what monstrosities of error are everywhere disseminated in a great multitude of books, pamphlets, written documents — small certainly in their size but enormous in their malice — from which goes out over the face of the earth that curse which we lament.[2]

The Church's reaction to media, at this stage, was one of suspicion and rejection. It looked at media as something which could not bring about any good to humanity. Media were looked upon with suspicion as something dangerous which would poison society. This presumption made the Church reject media altogether. The solution the Church arrived at was a clear and definitive censorship. Some books, some dramas, some films were declared sinful and leading to sin. In order to save the sons and daughters of the Church from this destructive force the Church imposed censorship on certain items of the media.

This corrective measure, however, did not prove to be very effective. Since forbidden fruits are sweeter even the most devout Catholics seemed to ignore censorship at times. So, at this stage the Church's attitude turned into irritation and ambition. To grapple with the problem another way was tried out. As the Church could no more prevent the faithful from consuming programmes she deemed poisonous, she felt challenged to combat the worldly influence of the media with her own use of these media. This was the second trend. Seeing the influence of media, the Church sought to use media at any cost so that people would be attracted to the teachings of the Church.

Thirdly, along with other people of goodwill, the Church started to reconsider the media and to assess their function in society. It is at this stage that we see the Church taking steps to critically understand the media. Discriminatory use and compassionate service characterised this trend. All these trends are reflected in the Documents the Church published at different periods.

The three trends developed successively in time but one did not replace the other. The second trend added to the first and the third added to the first two. The pastoral concerns which

2. Cited by Benito Spoletini in *Communication social e Iglesia* (Ediciones Paulinas), p. 13.

appeared in the three successive trends are complementary. It would be a loss to the Church if one concern obliterated the other two. The question which today confronts pastors is that of blending realistic suspicion, even occasional rejection, of the media with critical understanding. Gaston Roberge raises some questions of pastoral concern in this regard: "How to lead the faithful in compassionate service of the media and, at the same time, how to protect them against these media? How to situate oneself both inside and outside this world which awaits the salvific action of Christ? Only tolerance — indeed loving acceptance — of diverse attitudes and approaches can lead to flexible, rich response to the media."[3]

The answer to the question raised above can be found in the Church's Documents on Social Communications. A quick glance at the documents of the Church on social communications[4] will help us to understand the Church's attitude towards social communication. It is needless to say that each document reflected the ecclesiology of the time. These Documents carrying varying degrees of authority have seen light down through the centuries.

Christianae Reipublicae (1766)

The first one to name in the category of social communications was the encyclical letter *Christianae Reipublicae* (1766) of Pope Clement XIII. This was written to exhort the faithful on the dangers of anti-christian writings. The Pope there talks about bad books and the duty of bishops to deter the faithful from the evil of bad books and immoral literature. This encyclical up till now is the only one in recent history dealing with books and publishing at all. The instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1992 is again concerned on books and writings and does somehow remind on this document.

Vigilanti Cura (1936)

The encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* (1936) of Pope Pius XI, is the first pontifical encyclical on means of communication in the twentieth century and the first one to deal with film as one of the modern electronic media. It is significant in its positive approach

3. Gaston Roberge, op. cit., p, 20.

4. Cf. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, *Church and Social Communication*, Logos Publications, Inc., Manila, 1993, pp. 8–10.

to media rather than warning about its dangers which was the usual tone of many papal documents. It is first addressed to the hierarchy of the United States of America but then also to all other bishops of the world. The document takes its initiative from the experiences of the "Legion of Decency" in the United States. This Association was started by some priests and lay-people around 1930 in order to counteract the production of morally bad films and to support public opinion in favour of morally good films. The people joining this movement became an influential force to be respected by film producers and distributors in the United States. The American bishops sent a detailed documentation about these positive experiences to the Secretariat of State in the Vatican which was headed that time by Eugenio Pacelli who later became Pope Pius XII. Pope Pius XI through this encyclical wanted to promote this initiative taken by the Legion of Decency beyond the boundaries of the United States of America to the whole world.

In the encyclical after giving the historical background the doctrinal part deals with the importance of film and the need to be vigilant. The importance of film is further elaborated through the treatment of the themes on the power of motion pictures and their popularity and impact. In the second part practical proposals have been drawn by suggesting standards for production and moral obligation.

In order to know about the moral quality of films a classification system had to be set up possibly on the national level which eventually resulted in the creation of national film offices. These later became part of the official Church structure in social communications. The encyclical also addresses for the first time the whole catholic hierarchy on matters of film and shows the value and challenges of this modern means of communication.

Two years prior to the publication of *Vigilanti Cura* the Secretariat of State sent a letter to the president of the International Catholic Film Organization (OCIC) on film which was considered that time a basic Church document on film. It expresses the concern for the moral issues involved in a medium which has greater influence than print media on the masses. After the publication of *Vigilanti Cura* Pope Pius XII extended the Church's considerations on film with two extensive presentations which

have been labelled as "psycho-social-moral treatises on film". On June 21, 1955 the Pope spoke also to the representative of the Italian film industry on the importance of film as art according to technical, artistic and psychological aspects and on the ideal film for the recipient. On October 28 of the same year he spoke to the International Union of Theatre owners and Film distributors to continue his treatise from June in speaking about the ideal film in relation to content and human society i. e., family, state and Church.

Miranda Prorsus (1957)

The encyclical letter *Miranda Prorsus* (1957) of Pope Pius XII follows and further unfolds the Church's view on electronic media, adding to Pope Pius XI's consideration on film (*Vigilanti Cura*) as well as radio and television.[5] Since the invention of printing press by Johannes Gutenberg around 1450 the Church had to deal with press and printing. Then a new era of electronic media dawned. It is to be noted that after the signing of the Lateran pact in 1929, Pope Pius XI asked Guglielmo Marconi who invented radio to build a radio station within the new Vatican State. In 1931, the Holy Father inaugurated the new radio station with a speech in Latin that was heard all over the world. This was a historic event in the field of media. After seeing the influence of electronic media it has become necessary for the Church to issue a document on the subject. *Miranda Prorsus* is a document exclusively devoted to the electronic media — film, radio and television.

The encyclical must be seen in the background of Pope Pius XII's other rich teachings on matters of social communication. More than 60 speeches and texts on different areas and questions on communications characterize the openness for and interest of Pope Pius XII in this field. Already on December 16, 1954 he had extended the responsibilities of the former office of the Pontifical Council for Film to Radio and Television.

In this document Pope gives a clear analysis of electronic media. He takes a positive approach to the electronic media, their potentials and to the pastoral needs arising from this. Some state that the quality of this document was not surpassed even by

5. Cf. ibid., pp. 22–24.

II Vatican decree *Inter Mirifica.* They rather see the approach of this document to be more related to the spirit of the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* which was later published in 1971.

The contribution of *Miranda Prorsus* is its clear vision for future developments, the analysis of the effects of the electronic media and the exposition on the consequences to be taken out of this for the pastoral work of the Church. In a certain way, it summarizes part of the teachings of Pope Pius XII at other occasions. This is expressed especially in the general considerations of the first part of the document but it can also be found in the specific sections where *Miranda Prorsus* talks about different media. As for film, the Pope had already dealt with the ideal film in two speeches in 1955. The special concern of the Pope in all his pronouncements on communications is the need for truth and the moral-pastoral obligations originating from it.

This encyclical can be considered as a continuation and extension of the teachings of *Vigilanti Cura.* In the preparation for the II Vatican Council document on social communications this encyclical together with Pius XII's teaching on the ideal film was a special source. In fact, the first proposal for the Vatican II document reiterates in its first sentence of the proposed introduction the words "Miranda Prorsus".

Inter Mirifica (1963)

In the first general consultation of Pope John XXIII in June 1959 about matters to be discussed by the coming council, the means of communication were not mentioned and also in the 9348 proposals for the council from the whole world which reached Rome till spring 1960 only 13 referred to the mass media.[6] It was out of the work of the preparatory commission for the Council that a last minute proposal for a "Secretariat for Press and Entertainment" was created under the umbrella of the preparatory commission for the "modern means of the apostolate". Originally conceived as an office to assist journalists this commission was officially erected with the Motu Proprio *Superno Dei Nutu* on June 5, 1960 and eventually came up with a document to be included in the agenda of the II Vatican Council.

6. Cf. ibid., pp. 56–60.

The Council prepared a schema with 114 sections and it was approved by Pope John XXIII for inclusion in the council documents. The proposed text was discussed by the council fathers at the end of their first session in November 1962. The proposal was finally discussed in the plenum of the Council in more than three sessions. Before this, the council had for long and intensively discussed the liturgy and some observers felt that these discussions on social communications were, by quite a number of fathers, considered more as a relaxing enterprise in comparison to the foregoing deliberations. The level of the altogether 41 interventions made in the discussion was more pastoral than professional from the communications point of view. They rather confirmed or corrected the given text than brought new arguments or free ideas.

One recurrent criticism was the length of the proposed document. The original document of 114 paragraphs was reduced to 24 and the status changed from a constitution to a council decree. Before the final voting in 1963 this decree received quite some criticism as not being up to the mark of a council and the professionality of communications.

Inspite of the above-mentioned criticisms one must see the following positive points and incentives given by *Inter Mirifica:*

1. It is the first time in the history of the Church that an ecumenical council discussed the means of social communication and came up with a document. The value of a council document is far beyond any individual pronouncement of a Pope like an encyclical letter or speeches at certain occasions.

2. With the council decree a new terminology was created in the expression of "Social Communications". The preparatory commission felt that expressions like 'diffusion techniques' or 'audio-visual media' or even 'mass media' would not sufficiently express the concerns, needs and perspectives of the Church. Communication should not be restricted to mere technical means of transmission but rather be concerned about communication as a process between and among human beings. Thus the expression proposed was: the "instruments of social communication" which would point to the communication of and in human society. This definitely does go beyond the mass media as press, radio, TV or film. Already, the first original document for the council discussion

had six paragraphs under the heading of "other means of social communication" which included means like public announcements, posters, advertising, audio-tapes, records etc. Also the emphasis on the means for group communication can be seen already in this expression. This proposal for a new terminology was accepted by the council without further discussion and later applied it to other Church documents. It seems to be clear from this terminology that 'social communication' as the communication of and in human society, includes beyond the mere (modern) technical means all other forms of human communication as expressed in societies and cultures.

3. The decree *Inter Mirifica* also introduces a "world day of communications" (No. 18) "on which the faithful should be reminded of their duties in this domain". They are asked not only to pray for the apostolate but also to contribute financially. This 'world day of communication' is the only day especially recommended by the II Vatican Council and it was observed annually since May 1967. The messages of the Pope for these days must be considered as contributions to the Church's thinking on different aspects of social communication. Since 1968, every world day has a special theme. This is the 31st year. Incidently, the Indian Church observes this day on the third Sunday of November. The theme of this year's message is: "Communicating Jesus — The Way, the Truth and the Life".

4. The Council decree also proposes (No. 19) an overall office for the instruments of social communication at the Vatican. Pope Paul VI established this office of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 1964. The Council also decreed that national offices for the press, cinema, radio and television be established everywhere and properly supported. The main task of these offices should be the unification of efforts and the formation of conscience and encouragement of catholics in their field.

5. *Inter Mirifica* also lays stress on professional training of Church personnel to meet the challenges of the times. This also includes the section on media education and the involvement of lay people (Nos. 15 & 16).

6. A significant contribution of the decree is its proposal that mass media should be placed at the service of evangelization. On this the council has this to say:

> The Church claims as a birthright the use and possession of all instruments of this kind which are necessary or useful for the formation of Christian and for every activity undertaken on behalf of human salvation (*IM* No. 3).

Given the sublime aim of the Church, costs and technical difficulties should not deter her from using the media:

> It would be dishonourable indeed if the Church sluggishly allowed the Word of salvation to be silenced or impeded by the technical difficulties and the admittedly enormous expenses which are characteristic of these instruments. Hence the Sacred Synod admonishes the Church that she is duty bound to uphold and assist Catholic newspapers, magazines, movie enterprises, and radio and television stations and programmes whose main purpose is to spread and defend the truth and to strengthen the Christian texture of human society (*IM* No. 17).

7. In a special paragraph, the council fathers "expressly direct the Pontifical Council for the Instruments of Social Communication to publish a pastoral instruction with the help of experts from various countries". This instruction *Communio et Progressio* which was finally published in 1971 thus becomes part of the II Vatican Council's efforts on social communications.

Communio et Progressio

The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* is the direct result of a proposal of the II Vatican Council.[7] In the discussion of the initially proposed longer document essentials were chosen from the original 114 items and left it to the later Pastoral Instruction to go into more details. The *Inter Mirifica* demands (No. 23) such a Pastoral Instruction to be edited by the "Pontifical Council for the Means of Social Communications".

The phrase *communio et progressio*, communion and development, defines the goal of the Church in her communication ministry. The twin concepts of communion and development are, in fact, an application to social communication of the twin concepts of faith and justice. To promote social communication is to promote faith and justice. Indeed, as an expert has suggested, the very notion of a more 'balanced flow' of communication in

7. Cf. ibid., pp. 70–73.

the world today is 'perhaps the most recent incarnation of the millennial concept of justice'.[8]

Imbibing the spirit of the document 'the Church hopes that as a result of her spiritual contribution, the basic nature of social communication will be more clearly appreciated. The Church hopes too that the dignity of the human person, both communicator and recipient, will be better understood and respected. In this way this social interplay that makes neighbours of men can lead to true communion' (*CP* No. 102).

Communio et Progressio has been regarded as one of the most positive Church documents on social communication. A scan through the contents will show that the document does not start with the rights and duties of the Church but with a theological foundation with the contribution of the communications media to human progress. These considerations cover almost half of the total text. Whereas former documents tended to give orders and to refer to the rights and obligations of the Church, the Pastoral Instruction builds more on personal responsibility.

Theologically, the Instruction transcends other documents in giving some theological pointers (Nos. 6-15) for further reflection and development: Christ is seen as the perfect communicator, the eucharist shows how communication leads to communion and the role of the Holy Spirit and the trinitarian dimension of any christian communication is indicated.

Communio et Progressio has been considered as the "magna charta" of christian communication and a document with the most positive, professional and concrete approach to communication and the Church. The authors themselves however, do not consider this instruction as the final word of the Church on the subject, but they rather hope "that this publication marks not so much the end of a phase as the start of a new one" (No. 186). They "look forward with confidence and even with enthusiasm to whatever the development of communications in a space age may have to offer" (no. 187).

Aetatis Novae (1992)

Aetatis Novae is presented as a commemoration of twenty years since the publication of *Communio et Progressio.* It takes

8. Antonio Pasquali, 'Mass Media and National Culture', *Media Asia*, Vol. 5. No. 2, 1978, pp. 62–67.

as its starting point the theological frame work of *Communio et Progressio.*[9] *Aetatis Novae* announces itself as a document quite modest in comparison with its predecessor. There is little of the sweeping theological vistas, comprehensive public philosophy of media, and landmark guidelines of ecclesial communication outlined in *Communio et Progressio.* In this pastoral letter the Pontifical Council for Social Communications 'simply wishes to provide a working tool and a measure of encouragement to those confronting the pastoral implications of the new realities of social communication' (*AN* No. 1). The tone of *Aetatis Novae* is more tentative, preferring to outline themes for further reflection and discussion in the local Church rather than provide definitive answers.

The major and central recommendation of *Aetatis Novae* is that the social communications be made an integral part of the pastoral planning of the diocese, the regions and national episcopal conferences. The most concrete set of actions encouraged are listed in a set of guidelines — "Elements of a Pastoral Plan for Social Communications". Although these are termed as appendix, one has the impression that these are perhaps the central message of *Aetatis Novae.* Indeed, the message is coming through "loud and clear": although *Communio et Progressio* provided us with a beautiful, idealistic vision of communication in our societies and in the Church, at the level of the typical diocese and parish there has often been little action. The Catholic Church, in comparison with other groups, still has not put a new era of communications to work to communicate the gospel both within ecclesial communities and to the society around it.

Although all pastoral instructions are written in a particular way for the bishops, *Aetatis Novae* specifically asks bishops to take action. Perhaps there is the feeling that bishops tend to ignore complex speculative documents, but they are more likely to respond to shorter documents that outline rather concrete lines of action. Underlying this is a presupposition that if bishops, with the leaders of their dioceses, begin to contemplate concrete actions, they will have to take notice of the changing patterns of

9. Cfr. Robert A. White, 'Twenty years of evolution in the Church's thinking about communications', *Communicatio Socialis,* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992), pp. 248–259.

communication around them, how these changing patterns are affecting values and how we need to change the way the Church communicates. The document's emphasis on pastoral planning reflects quite accurately many of the major shifts of thought over the past twenty years among those involved with the communication activities of the Church throughout the world.

Guide to the Training of Future Priests (1986)

This is a document prepared by the Congregation for Catholic Education. This is one of the many 'guides' the Congregation released regarding the formation of those aspiring for priesthood. It is a fact that nowadays people receive their information and convictions not only from books and teachers but more and more through audio-visuals. It is of utmost importance, therefore, that priests should be well versed in these methods. Practical steps are suggested as to how to impart this education in seminaries. This Guide has two important appendices. The first one is a listing of quotations from 41 official documents of the Church on the training of clergy for the mass media, from 1935 to 1985. The second is a list of subjects proposed for study and teaching.

Pornography and violence (1989)

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications publishes occasionally directives and consideration on areas of special concern for the communication of the Church.[10] This document on Pornography and violence is such an initiative. It is called a 'pastoral approach' which clearly indicates what approach this document has taken.

Pornography and violence have been mentioned occasionally in other Church documents but more in passing than in an elaborate way. In the present document of the Pontifical Council, however, the problems of pornography and violence are for the first time addressed in a more systematic and extended way, giving definitions, reasons and possibilities for action in the communications perspective.

It should also be noted that pornography here is related to violence as two areas which are very often interrelated or stem from the same or similar disorders in human life and society. The

10. Cf. Franz-Josef Eilers, op. cit., 142–43.

document deals with pornography and violence in all communication means including theatre, recordings, video-cassettes, advertising and telecommunications (No. 5) it also includes the mass media like books and magazines, film, radio and Television. The text basically describes the effects, the causes of and possible remedies to the situation of pornography and violence.

Criteria for Ecumenical and Interreligious Cooperation in Communications (1989)

The vast field of social communication offers special opportunities, challenges and needs for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation. Taking note of this the Pontifical Council for Social Communications already published criteria for ecumenical cooperation. Again in 1989 the Council published more elaborate criteria not only for ecumenical but also for interreligious cooperation in communications. This document is largely based on the thinking of II Vatican Council.

Instruction on Some Aspects of the Use of the Instruments of Social Communication in Promoting the Doctrine of the Faith (1992)

This is another document on matters of social communication which is published by a Vatican Office other than the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. This document does not enunciate new principles but it gathers existing norms in a brief document in which long valid principles are made more readily accessible. It is a useful summary of the norms of Church law on the subject of books and articles on Catholic doctrinal and moral teaching either written by Catholics or published under Catholic auspices.

Ethics in Advertising (1997)

"Ethics in Advertising" is the latest document published by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. The Pontifical Council, in this document, recognizes the importance of advertising as a method of communication. "Advertising", says the document, "using media as its vehicle, is a pervasive powerful force shaping attitudes and behaviour in today's world." According to the document, advertising is not only a mirror of society but it also influences our lives. This document stresses "the

responsibility of media to contribute to the authentic, integral development of persons and to foster the well being of society".

The document well assesses the advantages of advertising as well as its negative aspects. It emphasises that "there is nothing intrinsically good or intrinsically evil about advertising. It is a tool, an instrument: it can be used well, and it can be used badly". It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed toward 'having rather than being'.

In conclusion, through this document the Church defines the notion of the realization of the human person. Advertising should raise awareness in the individual and "form our conscience, to make it the object of a continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good". We must be free to judge what is reasonable and worthwhile (as opposed to destructive) while being aware of manipulation and influence. It is everyone's duty to have respect for truth, the dignity of being, and responsibility.

Pontifical Messages on World Communication Day

Our study on the Church documents on communication will be incomplete if we lose sight of the Pontifical messages that are published on World Communication Day every year since 1967. On this occasion, the Pope publishes a message which treats of the theme that he chooses that year. These themes mostly relate to current issues of Church and society and their relation to social communication. Thus the Pope has an opportunity every year to relate the need for proper and effective communication to areas like the family, youth, the elderly, peace and justice, human freedom for evangelization and reconciliation.

Seen together, these messages over three decades give quite a good insight into the Church's communication approaches.[11] These can be considered a basis for a deeper analysis of the Church's contribution to human society as well as to the communication of the Church herself. The underlying assumptions for many of these messages very often show a certain optimism in the power of the media and also give warnings about possible damages.

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11. Cf. ibid., pp. 198–99.

Conclusion

We have come to the end of our search of the Church's documents on Social Communication. We do not claim to have exhausted the list. We were scanning through the documents that were directly dealing with the topics on social communication. There are many other Church documents like *Evangelii Nuntiandi, Redemptoris Missio* etc. which give forceful reference to Social Communication. These do not come directly under the purview of the present study. Hence we do not enlist them here.

As we assess these documents we see a gradual development in their approach. As mentioned at the beginning the Church's attitude to media is being evolved. It has changed from that of suspicion and rejection into a critical and sympathetic attitude towards media. While the Church was staying outside the media world in the earlier centuries now it has crossed the border and gone right into the media field. Rising to the occasion the Church has come out with various documents which are relevant to the modern human. The tone of post-conciliar documents seems to be more tentative. They do not try to provide definitive answers but rather prefer to outline themes for further reflection and discussion.

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Media Explosion and the Church

John Edappilly

With the advent of the latest electronic technology in the media world there is truly an explosion in communication, which had begun with the oral tradition and passed through the written medium, print technology, etc. The church which is entrusted with the task of proclaiming the word of God is also very much concerned with the media. Though there is much to be desired still, the church on the whole is trying her best to make good use of the media for the effective discharge of her mission. The author also reminds that the church should not ignore the media because of the negative influences it brings about, but train people, including pastors and layleaders, to view the media critically and use it creatively.

The Church, though slow to change by nature, has always proved herself competent to cope with the pressures and challenges of the changing world. Electronic media have turned out to be the super power in the modern world. Its implications and innovations create imperatives of change in the life and expressions of the church. Though a bit resistant in the beginning, the church is now trying not only squarely to face the challenges of media explosion but to become the champion and pioneer in the media world for the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The Church and Communication Closely Related

The ever evolving inherent dynamics and the indeterminancy there of make the media phenomenon all the more mysterious. Searching the roots and backgrounds, understanding the power and expression, and planning the right use of media in fixture have become extremely important for the church.

The very terms communication and media are emerging into unpredictable levels of extension and comprehension. One of the

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most authoritative study on communication in the 20th century was done by an experts committee of UNESCO headed by Sean Mc Bride the Irish statesman and it was published under the title *Many Voices, One World* (UNESCO, Paris 1980). The prime position of communication was clearly brought out in the Mac Bride report when it stated that communication "maintains and animates life", is an "expression on social activity and civilization", and "a common pool of ideas".[1] Communication is understood to be at the very heart of social experience. The communication and media are closely interrelated but they are not mutually inter-changable terms. Despite this fact even the modern media professionals are used to equate "communication" with "media". Actually what is happening here is reducing the reality of communication to its merely instrumental aspect. This unclarity or equating tendency underlies the very title of this article too.

Progressively the church has grown to the full realisation of the decisive role media is playing in the life of the people. The Papal document *Aetatis Novae* proclaims, "As more than just a technological revolution,today's revolutionin social communication involves a fundamental reshaping of the elements by which people comprehend the world about them and verify and express what they comprehend".[2]

The awareness and conviction of the church behind this statement is so rich and far reaching. It senses the socio-psychological and ecclesiastical areas of change and challenge effected by the change of media of communication in the modern age. This sensibility is very important in the life of the church especially in relation with the global frame work of church mission: evangelisation. The Latin American Episcopal Conference (Puebla, Mexico, 1979) in its document, "Evangelisation and social communication in Latin America" maintains that, "Evangelisation, the proclamation of the Kingdom, is communication".[3] The Papal document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* makes it clear that "Evangelisation would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social".[4]

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1. Mac Bride Report, P. 19.
2. *Aetatis Novae* 5.
3. Puebla No. 1063.
4. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 35.

Communication being at the very heart of man's personal and social life, every implication and influence of communication in human life is of paramount importance for the church. The church must clearly learn the changes and challenges, the chances and channels offered by the modern media explosion in the present day world, in order to justify her existence and accelerate her mission meaningfully. What I try to analyse in this study are the backgrounds, reasons and realities of modern media explosion relating to the church and the attempts needed and taken to face this situation.

As a student of communication media and social analysis I find the theory of the Canadian Scholar Harold Innis highly meaningful and acceptable as a basis to understand the power of media. The prevalent communication style of a society would decide the pertinent aspects of its social, intellectual and even spiritual approach.

The progressive on-growth of human civilization has discovered varieties of communication skills and techniques in the history. The style of interdependence of individuals, pattern of society structures, and the very vision of human life seem to grow and change according to the implications and inner powers of the media and systems of communication that become prevalent at each juncture of history. Harold Innis powerfully asserts: "Western civilization has been influenced by communication and the marked changes in communication have had important implications".[5]

The authority and control of the society always rested in the hands of the individuals or groups who commanded the system and operations of communication. In each period of history we can trace the implications of media of communication upon the character of knowledge, style of authority, organizational structures and the systems of checks and balances in the society. Ultimately the depth of knowledge and strength of authority rested on the clarity and command of the truth. In the past, religion always enjoyed the claim and command on the clarity of truth and enjoyed the right of its use for her advantage. Therefore in practice, religion always wielded powerful authority in the society by taking control of the media and communication systems.

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5. Harold A. Innis: The Bias of Communication, p. 3.

Stages of Developments in Communication

Oral Tradition

The first style of powerfully developed system of human communication was perhaps oral tradition. Meanings and ideas, emotions and interactions were communicated through the media of sound and words. This oral communication implied freshness and elasticity with eloquent and vibrant interactions. Innovative ideas and creative expressions would get a lot of room to develop in this system, while at the same time truth may get submerged in the variety and vividness of narrative forms. This situation naturally searched for an ultimate source and authority of truth. Oracles took that authoritative role in the society. The sooth sayers or oracle proclaimers get the right to say the last word in any conflict and they decide the reward or punishment for any individual, based on the supernatural contact of the priest. Thus religion ultimately enjoys the supreme power in this system of tribal society.

The written Tradition

The lucidity and elasticity of oracle sayings, the variety and variations in interpretations, the unorganised mass style of news dissemination, the very qualities of oral tradition, naturally created problems of instability of truth and variety of principles in the society. In order to meet this basic need of the stability of truth, the human found out the power of writing.

The written statement became the objective seat of the truths rather than the uttered oracles. To safe-guard and to celebrate such divine gift of revelation, solidified rock pieces and clay tablets became an important need of the community. As the source of truth and media of communication changed, he seat of authority and style and structure of the society got altered. Those who built up the temples and protected the source and authority of truth and revelation with wealth and strength began to participate in the role of governing the society. The priests joined hands with kings as rulers. A complex system of writing became the possession of a special class and tended to support aristocracies. Instead of loose and elastic structures of the society, there developed strict and permanent forms as the written tradition flourished. Tension arose between the two agents of authority, the priests and princes. There too the written word emerged as

the power of control. As Harold Innis puts it: "The temples with their priesthoods became the centres of cities. Invasions of force based on new techniques chiefly centring around the horse, first in the chariot and later in cavalry brought the union of city states, but a culture based on intensive training in writing rendered centralised religion an enormous influence. Law emerged to restrain the influence of force and of religion ... successful imperial organization came with the dominance of force represented by Pharaoh in Egypt, though the Egyptian empire depended on cuneiform for its communication. It was followed by the Assyrian, the Persian, the Alexandrian and the Roman empires".[6] The freedom of the priests to change the oracles was checked by the written word but they regained the authority by restricting the right of accessibility to the source in their hands and the wisdom of interpretation as their prerogative.

Use of paper and spread of writing hastened the growth of the vernacular and the decline of Latin in the west. This new development seemed to question and overthrow the monopoly and authority of the church. The religious power could never take this threat in a light vein. Any movement that seemed to question the authority of the church was ruthlessly stamped out. Establishment of new orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans and of the inquisition was designed to check the spread of heresy incidental to the emergence of translations in the vernacular and of oral discussions in the universities. The complex system of writing became the possession of a special class, priests and monks, and supported aristocracies. They tried to establish complete sway over social authority.

Print Technology

The first printed book has been dated 868 A. D., though the real printing technology with movable alphabets and mechanical power came into use only by the fifteenth century. The print technology of the industrial order with abundant supply of paper created an unprecedented revolution in the world of communication media.

With the help of printing industry the source of the truth, sacred scriptures, was no more under the monopolistic control of the monasteries or church authorities. Access to the source

6. Ibid., P. 6

became the right of every individual. The individual began to enjoy his power to know the source, to learn the truth, to make his interpretation, and form his own conclusions. The systematic control and manipulation of the source by the priests and princes was undermined together with their authoritative role, by the emergence of media which created the spread of source into the living rooms of individuals This change eventually expedited the sense of self-worth and power, and millions of possible ways of development in every field of human life.

It also changed the whole value system that controlled and commanded the social fabric. The revolutionary ongrowth initiated by print media, was assisted by the growth of Psychological and Sociological sciences. The protestant reformation in religion, French revolution in socio-political system, enlightenment movement in literature and culture, industrial revolution in economics and all the scientific and technological progress could be seen as caused by the sparks that emerged from the change of media. Dynasties crumbled down and democracies flourished, the authority chair and style of its exercise became quite different.

The intellectuals became powerful leaders in the society with decisive influence. Centres of intellectual activity like universities and scientific research institutes wielded greater command and admiration in the society. People who showed a better vision and promised a progressive growth were accepted as leaders and were given the power of authority through popular elections. Conceptual learning and communication became the topmost experience. The interpretation of truth by the priest or king was no more the last word.

The church reacted against this negatively in the beginning and tried to fight it tooth and nail. She resisted change in herself. But history shows that she eventually learned to adapt herself to the demands of the change and gradually captured the role of command in the new situation. Church allowed herself to be an object of scientific research and study. All kinds of critical studies about the Bible, theological researches, liturgical renewals, social reforms, media updating etc., became very common in the church in an effort to make herself more scientific and uptodate. She insisted that her priests and leaders be academically qualified and scientifically equipped. The system of seminary study developed. Mastering the modern media and meeting its demands, the religion

once again found herself safe in her role of authority and guidance, true, in a new style.

Electronic Media

What the print media did in the 15th century is repeated by the electronic media in the 20th century. The modern computerised communication technology has changed and challenged unbelievably the potentials and expectations of communication, together with the style of learning, seat of authority, nature of the society, and the very life vision and values of man.

Looking at the breath-taking changes caused by the electronic media, we are forced to say that this is not just a media revolution but a media explosion. To understand the implication and inherent challenges of this change of media we have to make a detailed analysis. And it calls for a new theological exploration from the part of the church.

Communication Explosion

Oral tradition was the normal growth expression of the human's need to communicate. Written tradition was a natural evolution of the oral style to meet with the weakness of oral communication. Print media was not just an evolution but a revolution in communication with the assistance of technology. Now, electronic media is not a revolution but an explosion.

The modern electronically computerised communication technology leads us to unapproachable heights. It seems to have conquered the problems of time and space making every human "omni-present" in the world at any moment of history. Any world event under the sun is watched by every one on the face of the earth simultaneously. The media has made it possible to watch wars, sports, launching of new scientific ventures, scenes of natural calamities, accidents, coups, antecoups, installations, discussions, decision making, births, marriages, deaths, funerals, rituals, etc. The technology became useful not only in disseminating some points of informations and instilling the same feelings and emotions into people, but also in directing them to form similar reactions and forcing them to accept the same judgements, though they are not always successful. This dramatic change has taken place not just on the popular mass level of Television watching, information seeking and sentiments-sharing but even

in the high level of serious socio-politicaland scientific discussions, explorations, deliberations and decision making through teleconferences and direct broadcast satellite systems. The internet, E mail, World wide We etc., have facilitated the emergence of the compact world. The whole world has turned out to be a country side to fit into the term coined by Marshall Mcluhan, "The Global Village", where every villager apparently knows and meets the other members and shares all the informations, sentiments and attitudes. The electronic revolution has not only conquered the time space limitation of the mundane situation but has also lifted us to the prestigious position of inerrancy. Even though stray incidents of scientific catastrophies, like Bhopal Tragedy, Chernobil, Challenger, 3 mile Island incident etc., have shocked the world to the freezing point, the scientific precision, meticulous calculations and predictive power exhibited by the computerized communication devices are matchless in inculcating in us a sense of infallibility in the secular world. All these towering achievements have piloted us to march at an unprecedented speed to the future.

Changes of socia! realities due to the change of communication media: Information has become power

The modern electronic technology has created an awareness that information is power. The control and decision making authority go into the hands of those who have the vast and most modern information and who could manipulate the information technology to their advantage. The nations try to control other nations through information embargoes and information manipulative conditions. In the latest wars of the world the most powerful weapon has been the most sophisticated communication systems and the targets of attacks are the communication networks of the enemies. Information banks coupled with seed banks predict and control the future of the society. Money markets controlled through information manipulation have been the root reason of any economic growth and decadence in the world rather than the scriptural source of the truth and the intellectual excellence of interpretation. This manipulator is no more the priest or the prince but the middle class and upper middle class people of the commercial world.

The nature of knowledge and learning changes

In the world of electronic broadcast communication system, it is neither the oral tradition nor the written tradition that is prevalent but a new one, the "Audio-Visual" tradition. The basic learning process is different. In the highly advanced communication networks of the world information signals are on the air about every topic under the sun throughout the twenty four hours a day. Everybody is free to open their receiving set to enjoy any program at any hour of the day. In the United States, it is said that human babies spend much of their day time before the T. V. from the sixth month of birth onwards. Parents and babysitters find it an easy way to engage the baby by switching on the T. V. Babies in the early childhood are exposed to any kind of topic and information without any discretion of age, growth, maturity and propriety. As Marshall McLuhan puts it "there is practically no more childhood".[7] The information bits a baby collects within a period of 10 years are beyond imagination. The parents naturally become unable to cope with their children's information explosion. The control and direction of parents and teachers loses power. In contrast to the existing class room learning where the teacher holds decisive authority, in the growing media system it is the student who decides what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, when to make the break, when to stop, when to change. The technology has given the factual possibility to choose in the hands of the student. The authority position is again under fire.

Wealth of traditional wisdom, handed down through generation from the treasure of life experience appear silly. Instead, the soap opera life ideals of an imaginary world become the passion of the growing youth. Popular common sense solutions, publicly discussed and agreed upon the T. V. talk shows become highly accepted solutions for intricate personal emotional crisis and relational tensions.

The shortest span of attention for the fastest intake of information is encouraged by the colourful, action-filled, sound saturated commercial extravaganza competitions of the television screens. It irritably shortens the human's capacity for long time attention to and concentration on anything. The method of instant gratification has become more attractive an enjoyment than the

7. Marshal McLuhan: *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, pp. 7–21

delayed or differed results of hard work and long time effort. The news stories become much more important and credible than the true stories. The credibility of truth is not in hearing from a superior authority (faith), nor in the conceptual conclusion of a syllogistic logic but in the exciting vividness of perceptual impression experienced through the multi-perspective light and sound of camera lense and editing sense. The overall change is that conceptual knowledge is replaced by perceptual experience. Intellectual activity is substituted by the excitement of emotional impacts. Imaginative creativity gives way to image collection. The world of information bits become wide and intellectual depth becomes shallow.

The commercial culture of modern media defies Social Concerns

The social life of the human is miserably affected by the modern media. The electronic medium of television is broad-casting more entertaining, colourful, pictorial, seductively realistic and surprisingly attractive programs. People used to come back home after the day's work to share the worries, to care for each other, to support the sufferer, to enjoy the gains, to appreciate the achievements, to encourage the hard workers, to express their faith in each other and in God. Now they do not have time or interest in it. All are gradually getting engrossed in watching the tempting shadow box of the social buffoons. The interpersonal communication is getting lost even in the intimate unit of family. Personal relationships are substituted by the electronic relationship of the global village. Due to the lack of true interpersonal relationships more and more self centred introvert personalities grow in the society.

The sense of social concern and commitment becomes very low, restricted to the image perception. Every incident, like world catastrophies, wars, earth quakes, riots, explosions, incidents, floods, famine, anything is an element of audio visual enjoyment just like a sports program, marriage or feast celebration or any other colourful extravaganza.

The Religious Response of the Church

All the religious traditions, especially Christianity, are essentially based on and concerned about communication. Every

religion is God's self communication, building the human community in the image of divine inner communication. Communication is a fundamental divine act as well as a fundamental human fact. Church as a community of faithful an church as the body of Jesus Christ, is called to communicate to the whole world what God has communicated through ages in and through Jesus Christ. Church as a human society has the responsibility to understand the message and interpret and communicate it according to the needs and demands of the time. It has to use the new language and new symbols, new expressions and new technologies of the growing times to make the message meaningful and credible to the people of the growing world. The church has powerfully tried to turn its attention and attempts to capture the modern communication language, symbols, and technology to make her efforts to communicate more meaningful as she had done in every stage of communication media development.

Computerization of church offices, accumulation of data, categorization of documents and files, hunting of talents, of persons, of resources, of new avenues of activity, planning and execution of administrative programmes and strategies, techniques of raising funds and support with the excellent deployment of computer technology, all are growing fast in the church in many parts of the world. Earnest efforts in updating the methods of teaching and learning have created computer networks of data banks and tele-docs on the theological topic, dictionaries, encylopaedias, homily banks for pastors etc. Tele-texts, video-texts, tele-mets, two way interacting tele classes are all made use of in teaching catechism. Dial-a-thought, Dial-a-counselling, Dial-a-prayer etc., are made mechanically available through hot-line services of telecommunication and technology. Television churches have emerged in America and Europe. More than two hundred Religious channels transmit programs of Christian teaching, preaching, panel discussions, group interactions, Eucharistic celebrations, administration of sacraments, prayer programs, healing services, miraculous cures etc., They claim that Jesus' vision of one fold and one shepherd is getting realized through this electronically communicated church where the word of God (that was heard) is proclaimed from the house tops.[8]

8. Ben Armstrong: *The Electric Church*, P. 78.

The Indian situation, though not fully advanced like the one in America and Europe, is heading towards that. Sensing the potentialities, the churches have already launched programmes of establishing media centres to produce christian literature, songs, art forms, slides sets, films, audio tapes, video cassettes and the like in a spirit of competition and prestige building.

Critical Approach

From the cursory survey of the effects of electronic communication technology in the modern world, it is very clear that there exists a lot of positive pushes and negative pulls as coming from the inherent nature of the very medium. The derogatory effects on the socio-religious and personal life levels caused by this medium are to a great extent disgusting. This sentiment naturally has prompted some people to accuse and abuse this modern growth. They dare to call it as devil's medium, and admonish people to avoid its use and influence in their lives. Such a puritanic approach involves a fundamentalist's view in it, and that kind of negativity would be another blunder. Evaluating the strength and weakness of the new medium and differentiating its potentialities and usage, discerning its biases and by products are very important in making the best use of this medium.

The electronic medium of television with the help of colourful images, editing techniques, sound effects, musical back-ground and all kinds of electronic gimmics, has created a great sense of ecstatic tempo and mystical aura around its productions. Many a time to get the true story out of the news story we have to demythologise it ruthlessly. In every aspect of the media this kind of a demystification is a must to keep the balance of truth. For this purpose church will have to promote and promulgate Media Education as one of her greater priorities. To educate the young and old to critically watch, sensibly evaluate and meaningfully make use of the media will be a great mission today. This critical approach also would help to create better media products and to bring back the power of discernment of ideas and ideals that are disseminated through the media.

A discipline in the very style of watching of the programs, direction and parental guidance for minors, exercise in critical evaluation and balanced in-take could be encouraged through training programs for the youth. Sample programs of critical

appraisal should be introduced in the broadcast together with the training to use the tools of correct evaluation. Organising radio and T.V. clubs with this purpose is another way out. And that could help the youth to sensibly react to the media by writing comments and developing public opinion.

Creative Approach

Conscientization about the power and use of the modern media is the most important thing to be done in the church. The church leaders should be alert and trained to sense the socio-cultural changes that affect human life due to the influence of the electronic media. By avoiding all these modernity which are decisively influencing all the practical aspects of human life, the church would only get rejected as well as outdated. She has to get involved in this progress and guide it with the power of truth, justice, love and leadership.

The subject of communication media has to be introduced as a part of the curiculum of the seminaries. The future pastors must be able to use the modern communication media in their pastoral work with proper care and commitment. They must be able to sense the anti-human elements that would creep into the system and lead movements to correct such corrupt systems. More and more lay leaders should be formed to carry out this media mission in the society. New media devices and products should be made available to help teaching catechism, life guidance, spiritual training and best entertainments. In the field of production, avoiding unnecessary competitions and squandering of funds, different church organs and denominations could come together to form networks, to devise the roles, to produce better programs and could co-operate in the building up of the kingdom of God.

The media which are supporting the rich and powerful in the practical exercise, have the potential to pick up and expose powerfully the positive ideals of the poor, and to create a mass support for their growth. Technology has developed so much to make it easy to collect, highlight and protect the minor cultures, regional customs and folk art forms of the poor in the society. The church has to come forward in defense of the oppressed to strengthen them and save them through the media. Her funds

have to be channelised in this direction even against the commercial principles prevailing in the society.

In order to meet with the self centred anti-social mentality that is growing as the corollary of the modern media growth, the church has to encourage and create occasions for interpersonal encounters and communication. The liturgical assemblies should be made more meaningful as the time to meet with God and one's fellow brothers and sisters in faith and love. More chances for social interaction should be created. Intellectual sharings and media based discussions should be introduced to meet with the intellectual decay caused by the impressionistic intake of the modern audio-visual culture.

Whenever a new medium was introduced, always in history, there was new enthusiasm, attraction and change of attitudes and realities centred around the aura of the new one. That situation has helped to renew, reform and replace the old system, structure, style and authority. But it is a fact that never a tradition could be totally replaced. Each tradition has its strength and weakness whether it be oral, written, print or audio-visual. A society that could assimilate each style and place it properly in the right place and use it with balance and correct discretion, would flourish. This balance and discretion is still to be explored theologically with the help of prayer, thinking, experience and united effort, to reach its fulness.

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Trichur — 680 001.

Book Review

Vandana Mataji (ed.), *SABDA SHAKTI SANGAM,* is two-books-in-one with a front cover for each without a back cover, on one side of which is the Hindu Section pp. xxvi + 436, and on the other the Christian Section pp. xxxii + 374, Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir, Tapovan Sarai, Rishikesh, 1995.

As the title of the book suggests this is the *Sangam* of *Shabda* and *Shakti* experienced by different *sadhakas* of *Shabda* which is expressed in *Shakti* of writing. It is a timely *Sangam* of various writers, artists and theologians of both christian and Hindu religious traditions, especially in this age of Religious Dialogue and Religious Pluralism. The credit goes to the editor in bringing together various *upasakas* (worshippers) and *sadhakas* (practitioners) of *Shabda* and *Shakti* into a *Sangam* of Religious harmony, mutual love and understanding. To look at it will lead one to the realisation of diffent values in one's life. It gives a short encyclopaedic knowledge about Indian Spirituality.

As the editor acknowledges in the Introduction, the 'upside down' book is brought as a Sangam of celebration of two great spiritual leaders: Swami Vivekananda who went to the West to share the Indian Religious tradition and whose centenary was celebrated in 1993-1994, and Swami Abhishiktananda who came to India searching for God-experience in forests and in the cave of the heart, and whose 20th anniversary of Samadhi was held on 7th Dec. 1993. Both these Swamijis are models of in-depth religious dialogue.

Again as the editor puts it, this is a "Book in Dialogue", with an equal distribution of topics to both religions in order to dialogue with. This book opens and deepens new vistas of religious dialogue at the level of *anubhava* (experience). Such dialogue should break down the barriers of misunderstanding and lead every one to core-to-core communion.

The cover picture of the *Hindu section* is OM. In this section there are eight parts: Part I *The Truth and the Life* — has three chapters with 20 essays/articles by 18 authors. Part II The *Journey to the Divine* — has eight chapters contributed by 16 scholars. Part III *Hindu Perceptions* — has four chapters on Women in Hinduism today, by six authors. Part IV *Hindu*

Saints, Sages and Mystics consists of 11 chapters starting with Sri Ramakrishna and ending with Sadhu Vaswani; in this list the the 13th cent. saint Akkadevi and the 16th cent. saint Meera Bai are included. Part V *Hinduism as Perceived by Christians* — has eight chapters by 8 authors. Part VI *Towards an Authentic Hindu Christian Dialogue* — with 17 articles. The first five deal with the Dialogue, 6th An Open Letter, then 7-16 Women's Role in dialogue and different ways of dialogue, for ex., education, mass media, marriage etc. The 17th chapter is an Appeal to the Hindus. Part VII *Towards an Inter-faith Harmony* — is to be read from the upside down part of the christian section. Part VIII *Swami Vivekananda* — has two chapters — the pilgrim of India with unifying vision and mission by 2 authors. Thus the Hindu section merges with the Christian in an upside down way at the centre with the Indian and Christian traditional pictures (symbols) of God: Shiva and Christ crucified. Both symbols merge in bringing new life to humanity by destroying the evil powers of the devil and death.

The *Christian section* has the Holy Spirit (dove) on the cover. This section also has eight parts: Part I *The Truth and the Life* — with three chapters — tries to conceptualise the christian faith in an Indian way, using Indian terminologies, like *dharma* (teachings) of Jesus, dharma of the First Testament, *avatar* (incarnation), *saccidananda* (being-consciousness-bliss) etc. This is contributed by nine scholars. Part II *The Journey to the Divine* (*the Ways*) — consists of eight chapters, explaining the ways of reaching God: namely, prayers, sacraments, symbols, morality, christological perspectives of the Way, Prayer, Reflections on Women, Role of the Spiritual Director, Asceticism, Fasting, Pilgrimage, Silence and Festivals. This is contributed by 27 scholars. Part III *Christian Perceptions* — has four chapters, dealing with the Role of Women, the Silence Word, Inculturation and Indian Christian Spirituality, Christian Ecumenism and Christian Fundamentalism. This is tackled by 7 scholars. Part IV *Christian Saints, Sages and Mystics* — gives short biographies of the leading saints of christendom from the middle ages ending with Bede Griffiths and Women Saints. This is contributed by 10 scholars. Part V *A Critical Appreciation: Christ and Christianity* as experienced by the Hindus. This part has 7 chapters written by separate 7 authors. Part VI *Towards an Authentic Inter-faith*

Dialogue — is to be read upside down from the Hindu section. Part VII *Inter-faith Harmony and Tomorrow* — has 16 chapters explaining various ways of breaking barriers and building bridges — In India at Ayodhya, Mangalore, Mahim, and outside India in Bangladesh, England, Australia etc. This is contributed by 20 scholars. This ends with an Afterword. Part VIII *Swami Abhishiktananda* — is treated in two chapters — which merges with the Hindu section at the middle of the book.

If we consider SSS as a combination of two religious traditions, then the following general features are found on both sides: (a) Blessing by Swami Chidananda, (b) Prayer by Raimundo Panikkar, and (c) Introduction by Vandana Mataji. If the christian section has Foreward by S. J. Samartha, the Hindu section has a Foreward by Swami Ranganathananda.

This book shows the charming and dynamic dialoguing Shakti the Editor has in bringing together the different people who are living far and near, into the Sangam of Shabda which is *dabar* in Hebrew, *Logos* in Greek, and by which (Shabda) this whole universe is made (Ps. 33.6), and which is the origin of both Hindu and Biblical religions. The Bible says: "Hear O Israel ..." (Deut. 6.4); in Hinduism *Sruti* or *sravanam* (listening) is the basis of real *bhakti* (loving devotion). What the rishis heard is known as Veda. Thus both religious traditions find their *Sangam* (confluence) in *Shabda* (the word) and in the experience of *Shabda* which is *Shakti* the "Power of the Most High".

This book compels the reader to dialogue with the other religious partner. If you are a christian, you have to go to the Hindu section Part VI and if you are a Hindu, you have to go to the Christian section Part VII, there you are told what the other thinks about you, hence you are invited to share your feelings and experiences. The photographs and sketches add meaning and relevance to the themes dealt with. The editor deserves congratulations in bringing out such a wonderful book. In one's dialogical approach to other religious traditions, one is reminded of taking off one's shoes, for the place one is approaching is holy ground which God has sanctified even before one's reaching there.

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